



幼女 1 戦記

Deus lo vult

【著】カルロ・ゼン Carlo Zen / 【画】篠月しのぶ Shinobu Shinotsuki



国

ターニャ・デグレチャフ年表

- | | |
|---------|--------------------------------------|
| [0ヶ月] | 二度目の生誕。 |
| [3ヶ月] | 「ターニャちゃん」として、初めて野菜をアーンした記憶。 |
| [3歳2ヶ月] | 読み書きを始める。 |
| [5歳1ヶ月] | 孤児院の中で食べ物をめぐる喧嘩に遭遇し、『平和的』解決を実現 |
| [7歳3ヶ月] | 孤児院付き教会小学校の健康診断で『魔導適正』が確認(バレたとも)される。 |
| [7歳4か月] | 将来的に徴兵されるという赤紙を受領。 |
| [8歳] | 帝国軍士官学校へ進学。 |
| [9歳] | 帝国軍士官学校を(繰り上げ)卒業。 |
| | 現在に至る。 |

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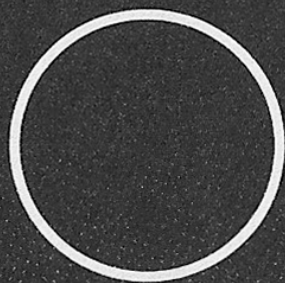
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[chapter]



第零章

プロローグ

Prologue



Prologue

C.E. 18th July 1914, Imperial Capital Berlun/Somewhere

The first thing “it” felt was the blinding light. Surrounded by the surreal feeling of gentleness and warmth, “it” enjoyed a brief moment of peace. This warm, yet slightly prickly sensation could completely make one forget oneself. Forget oneself? Right, as if something was lost, but what was it? What was the thing that had been forgotten?

Before even thinking about it, “it” started to tremble all of a sudden. After a short moment of delay, its mind began to comprehend the feeling of coldness; a coldness that could easily penetrate the skin. Just like a newborn baby feeling cold for the first time. However the subject in mind didn’t have the luxury to experience it in full.

As if suddenly encountering the assault of a previously known yet forgotten sensation, “it” began to panic under the intense feeling of suffocation, and started to struggle.

Lungs, body, every single cell within the body screamed for oxygen, the pain was unbearable. Unable to remain calm and to think, the only thing “it” could do was to struggle.

Without being able to exercise any control of the body, the only thing “it” could do was to struggle painfully under duress. All of the pain and suffering had easily clouded its consciousness, and then, as if finally liberated from the human existence which had not cried for the longest of time, the body started to cry instinctively.

With the consciousness murky and the sense of self a mess, “it” opened its eyes to a gray sky. A blurry world... No, perhaps it was only its vision that was blurred? It was a twisted world seen through unfitting spectacles. The outlines were blurry and the colours chaotic, even “it” who had not felt as much emotions in all those years began to sense the unease.

After what felt objectively to be about 3 years, “it” finally started to gain back its consciousness and form, feeling only pure confusion.

Just what the heck is going on? What happened to me? “It” entered a vessel that was unable to maintain consciousness for long periods of time, and still couldn’t properly recall this information. Therefore, “it” was unable to understand why the sound of a baby’s cry that was barely audible each time its consciousness began to fade had made “it” feel so embarrassed.

Mature adults aside, a baby would normally cry. Given a fair chance and appropriate protection, by rights a baby shouldn’t feel “embarrassed” at all. Therefore, “it”, with its senses and consciousness all jumbled started to relax, and threw this unclear sense of shame deep into the recesses of its memories.

After that, although still confused, “it” had finally gained a general idea of the situation “it” was currently in, yet even then, it only further added to its confusion. “It” clearly remembered that it was at the platform of the Yamanote Line, however, after snapping back to reality, “it” found itself inside a thick, stone-built, western-style building with a nanny-like nun wiping its lips. If this was a hospital, it was understandable to infer that an accident had occurred. That could also explain as to why its vision was blurry due to having suffered an injury.

However when its eyes could finally begin to see clearly of its surroundings, all that was in view under the dim lights were the figures of nuns wearing archaic attire. The reason for the dim light...if not mistaken, would be due to the gas lamps which clearly belonged to a different era.

“Come, Tanya-chan, ahhhhh—”

At the same time, “it” discovered something else that was abnormal; there were no electrical appliances in the room. In the modernized society of 2013, the room “it” was in simply contained way too much old and useless junk and was lacking in electrical appliances. *Are these people Mennonite conservatives or the Amish¹? Even so...why? Why am I in this place?*

“Tanya-chan? Tanya-channn?”

An unexplainable situation. The multitude of questions and doubts kept piling on and on.

¹ The **Amish** are traditionalist Christians known for simple living, plain dress, and reluctance to adopt many conveniences of modern technology.

“Alrighty, be obedient and open your mouth, Tanya-chan”

The current question which needed to be answered was, “Just what is going on?” Thus, “it” shifted its vision to the spoon served in front of it, but even though “it” had noticed the existence of the spoon, the thought that the spoon was for itself had never occurred in its mind. All it felt was to question why that “Tanya” person still hasn’t eaten yet.

However the nun that was in front of “it” (who was deeply in thought) must have reached her end of her patience. With a gentle smile that wouldn’t accept, “no,” for an answer, she shoved the spoon in her hand into “its” mouth.

“Don’t be picky now. Come. ahhhh——”

It was a spoon of stewed vegetables, but at the same time of this spoon, without a doubt, it dragged “Tanya” back to reality.

The over-stewed vegetables was the only thing that was stuffed into its mouth. But the one who was forced to eat this, this unexplainable situation only made its thoughts even more confused. In other words: *that...was me. The one they called Tanya.*

And then "it" screamed from the bottom of his heart—“*Why?*”

AD 1971, August 14th, United States

On the 14th of August 1971, after receiving an investigation request from the Office of Naval Research (ONR), Dr. Philip Zimbardo’s research group began a certain experiment. The experiment was designed to run for only two weeks. The aim was to collect data and to derive some basic understanding regarding the problem that marines often faced when put into Navy prison.

The participants that were selected for this experiment were all average healthy university students, both physically as well as mentally.

However, just by the second day of the experiment, they had already encountered a major problem on the ethical level. The students who were acting as prisoners had already begun to suffer from severe scolding and shaming done to them by the students who were acting as guards, and it even resulted in the guards directly

engaging in acts of violence. Such morally and ethically wrongful behaviour repeated frequently throughout the duration of the experiment, leading it to be cut short in just 6 days.

This experiment was later known as the “Stanford Prison Experiment.” While despite the widespread controversy and ethical dilemmas it had caused, the results of the experiment when looking from a pure psychological point of view, had ironically produced many rich and enlightening content. When grouped together with a previously conducted “Milgram experiment”, these two experiments had revealed many interesting notions regarding human nature.

In this isolated environment people obey power and authority; and people with authority will exercise it without limits. After analyzing this "Obedience to Authority" situation, the conclusion seemed to have quite some impact. The surprising thing was that, this phenomenon had nothing to do with a person's reason, conscience, or personality; but was rather brought forth by the persona of the role which was being acted out.

In other words, these two experiments clearly showed that humans will obey their environment, going so far as to willingly ignore their own reasoning and conscience. To say it in a more extreme manner, it is that anyone is capable of being a prisoner guard in Auschwitz¹.

Thus, speaking from a logical point of view, humans would always be affected by their environment, causing them to behave far from that of their own original nature.

After having learned of such matters regarding what kind of creatures mankind truly were during my time in university, the first thing which I felt wasn't discomfort but rather it was more of a natural acceptance as if I had expected it to be like that.

During elementary school, I guess everyone was taught that all humans are equal under the state's compulsory education. We learned that all humans are equal and irreplaceable. However judging from this, we could also easily find out that some situations were unequal.

¹ **Auschwitz**, A Nazi concentration camp in World War II, near the town of Oświęcim (Auschwitz) in Poland.

Why is the student sitting in front taller than me?

Why are some of the students in the class good at dodgeball, while others are not?

Why can't the student in my neighbouring seat solve such a simple question?

Why can't the student seated behind me stay quiet and listen to the teacher?

However, elementary students are placed in a "Be a Good Child" environment. Even if everyone is different, there is still the need to say that everyone is an important existence. The fear is that if they do not follow this rule, they would be labelled as "Bad Children".

So "Good Children" work hard to not become "Bad Children".

Then when preparing for middle school exams, "Good Children" start to despise "Bad Children" in their hearts, avoiding interaction with them. Successfully getting into a good middle school, followed by entering a high school with a high university enrolment rate, lastly into a well known university, they strive for perfection under these rules and conditions while going down the shortest path to success.

To continue acting as "Good Children" in this environment, it is required to keep on fulfilling other people's requests and not betray any expectations.

Constantly reading reference books and textbooks every day, then comparing their results with other students, feeling as if they have been placed in the middle of some sort of examination warfare, these students treat those who play games every day as losers. In this environment, where results are everything, they naturally look down on those students with poor academic results. On the opposite side, the poor students do not believe that they themselves are smart. After all, what little pride they had were already crushed by the aforementioned group of geniuses long ago.

While those students were still immersed in studying, those geniuses had already taken up the rights to join the international Physics or Math Olympics. To study with these genius students who treat the correct answer as a natural part of life in the same classroom, it was impossible to keep up with just extraordinary hard work. Still, even

though they were looking at this through a twisted view, they have only managed to learn the bare minimum in order to understand reality.

The other people taking the exams, even if they were unwilling, also understand that. To have parents with that amount of income, the minimum was to get into an excellent university and find an outstanding job. Thus they became just like other young people, filled with the passion to improve oneself. Their fear of falling behind would be crippling, so they hanged on to their study desk with tight grips.

Placed in this world where they struggle to safely breakthrough this exam warfare, after getting into the so called famous university, the game rules change. Willingly or not, most people among the group will realize that the world will start to judge you by "What you have done" instead of "Excellent results".

Facing this changed rule, only those who are able adapt well in this new environment are able to handle it.

On one side obeying, abusing the loophole and ridicule the rules, while on the other side being bounded by the rules.

In the end what they learnt was that rules were an irreplaceable presence for the optimization of the system. Unbound freedom is just pure destruction; rules that have no freedom is just a pure tyranny. Therefore, although he hated being restricted, at the same time he was worried about having unrestricted freedom.

He was unable to understand what are the people who were late for class thinking, unable to understand what kind of values do the people who got drunk lying beside the road had, unable to understand the brain of the PE department people who kept advocating about spirit.

Relatively, he was overjoyed for being able to give a reasonable explanation by pinpointing the relationship between rules and freedom at the Chicago school meet up. As long as one obeys the rules, you will be able to continue on the right track. All the while acting like a diligent student but actually hiding the fact of being an otaku. In his opinion, this is what it means to be free of the restriction of rules.

Friends who had pleasant interactions with him, other than his high school friends, are those people he met in university who had the same interests. Building relationships and ability with others, at the same time wasting some of their free time before going out to society. Of course there was also the need to invest diligently in

honing your skills, study vigorously till you reached an adequate standard of language and etiquette. After that along with the signalling theory¹, he will soon become a well praised excellent student.

Just that the demand for these kinds of people, surprisingly isn't for their ability, but more emphasis on what was on their resume. I guess for those who got excellent results for entrance exam, graduated from a famous school, plus were familiar with the interviewer, they were the best candidates available for the recruiter. Based on this reason, the unemployment tide for university graduates also couldn't really be counted as an obstacle.

After all the starting point is different. If you want to go according to the facts, it's a handicap race. Visiting the seniors in the company before going for an interview is a must. And not just that, you will still need to invite the HR recruiter for a drink and have a chat.

Don't even mention the senior from high school, or the senior during university who are now in charge of hiring people. They would just straight away give him advice "That company's HR department just happens to be looking for this kind of talent, it would be best to use this during the interview". With this kind of opportunity, even if you were only at an average standard, there would be no trouble finding job. As long as one was not picky about jobs, you would be able to get a decent salary. Becoming a cogwheel of society, submissively executing orders and just ensuring that its own part of job is completed. Then unknowingly, the referring of oneself from "boku" have turned into "watashi"².

Work ethics? Personal style? Creativity? As long as there was a proper salary for that amount of workload, a useful member of society will never question about the job content. And for the companies, they will pay the best talents that could do their assigned task to a satisfactory degree. Following and obeying the business theory without a single doubt, putting profit as priority. Getting used to this corporate lackey lifestyle, actually isn't that difficult.

Heartless? Cyborg? Cold blooded? Inhuman? You will only be worried about these things at the start. It is hard to understand such pathetic yelling, and I felt afraid of

¹ **Signalling Theory**, A theory that if you are good enough to convince others with your signals, you will achieve outstanding results.

² "**Boku**" to "**Watashi**", changing the childish way to refer to oneself to that of an adult, signifying maturity.

people who are in this crazy state, on the verge of using violence. But I got used to it, just like when I was schooling.

Humans are adaptable living beings. The so called environment adapting, is to act out the roles that were given to you, if you are a guard do your guard role well, and if you are a prisoner, do the prisoner role well. He was just like that, switching between the world of work and interest, living a peaceful life. Of course, work was conducted in the most efficient way possible, so as to prevent his own precious free time being wasted. Thus he obeyed all sorts of business requests, trying his best to avoid failure in his job.

Because of this, he caught up to both his parent's salary after thirty years old, and was well on his way to become a successful person. After that, due to his commitment to business and his loyalty to his superior, he was promoted smoothly in the HR department and lastly gifted with the position of section chief as his touchstone.

Oh, right. I still have an important job. No matter how big this misunderstanding is, I have absolutely no reason to let this nun stuff a spoonful of stewed vegetables into my mouth. And she is calling me Tanya-chan, which is really annoying. I'm qualified to be called a gentleman just by not screaming in rage regarding this matter.

Just when I became restless and was ready to get up and protest, "Why do you keep calling me....."——

A sharp pain in my brain made me recall unpleasant memories suddenly.

AD 22nd February 2013 Japan/Tokyo

"Why, why me!"

Why? Of course it's because your "value" is too low, in addition, you have missed work too many times. Lastly it's the report that was submitted to your superior, you seem to be burdened by multiple heavy loans of an unknown sum. And you strongly reject the therapy that the company has sent you to. In conclusion, you are obviously a liability to the company. It would be bad if you were to have some bad incident that caused the company's public trust to decrease. [So does the company still have any reason to keep you?], I really felt like answering that way. But it was against the regulation, so I was only able to bury it deep within my heart and answer back carefully.

"You have failed to meet PIP twice in a row. Understanding this, based on company guidelines, we have sent you for a training course to achieve your PIP and yet you rejected it. And you missed work every now and then without reason."

Saying that I'm looking down at people? So what? The regulation doesn't forbid me from doing this. Business is a profit seeking organization, not a care institution for useless people.

"Therefore, in my opinion after considering that you have contributed to the company through long years of service, instead of sacking you for failing to meet the expectations, it would be better for you to voluntarily resign."

Although saying it this way is a huge waste of time, but it's also part of the job.

"What kind of training is this?! I have never done outdoor sales before, and you are sending me to do that!?"

"For the company, this is a kind of countermeasure to prevent your performance from dropping. It is a necessary training course for the management personnel, for them to be in the shoes of an office worker and be encouraged to find better management guidelines."

How tiring. Coping with these people who keep crying and yelling, only wanting to get by through leeching off the organisation. These people are really troublesome. How good would it be if just by crying a bit one would be able to change the result. As a part of the business, I admit there are these kinds of tactics. But to always insult someone as being a heartless monster, bossy bitch, cyborg, etc. To complain to me once there was a need to rely on me is really——

I know that I am an inferior human. Unable to compare with the geniuses, unable to reach the elite status even with hard work, personality is also extremely distorted. Overall it's an abnormal aggregation of inferiority.

Thoroughly kind people makes me feel disgusted. They were hypocritical, it is commonly accepted within society to have a certain level of conscience, but it was because of this that they would be mocked at by themselves, this is simply hypocrisy.

Even so, despite being so ugly, I was still capable of having some pride, way better than this useless thing crying and shouting in front of me. After all in terms of "value", I am still maintaining some excellent results. So even when it comes to sacking employees during a company reshuffling. I will do it as perfectly as possible regardless of how troublesome it is. I guess next up is to continue on the path of Department Chief. Life should be smooth sailing after that.

....it was supposed to be like this.

After thinking up to this point, he will always recall that unpleasant experience.

Although it is said that humans are political creatures, but for a human who was recently sacked, even after considering ethics and societal common sense, they seem more like animals who act impulsively based on their emotions. Maybe they are different from those well-educated elite children from an organisation, in the end it seems that perhaps there are more people who are more open about being controlled by their emotions? The Department Head had already specially warned me to be careful of my back when I'm on a train platform, but I'm unable to understand the meaning behind his words. *Pon*, my body was suddenly pushed by someone. Flying out from the platform at an inexplicably slow speed. And while seeing a train drive forward, my awareness was suddenly cut off.

After regaining conscious, I immediately encountered a really absurd incident. "Are you all really living creatures?"

"I'm sorry, may I know who this is?"

An old man who is commonly seen in a generic novel, sighs while observing me. There were 3 possible answers.

First, I miraculously survived, although there are doctors who are currently helping with my treatment, but I am unable to fully understand this situation. Which means there might be serious issues with my eyes or brain.

Second, this is a dying delusion or illusion. Might be my whole life flashing before me.

Third, I am experiencing Zhuang Zhou's butterfly dream¹ went through, and I am awakening in the actual real world. I probably fell asleep.

"....I deeply feel that you are a group of mad people. Actually having such nonsensical thinking."

He is able to read my mind? If that is true, considering one's right to privacy and all sorts confidential matters, that behaviour really pissed me off.

"That's right. Reading the minds of people like you who have no compassion is really unpleasant."

"This is really surprising... I never thought that the devil really exists."

"I was wondering what you were going to say next, but in the end it's this huh?"

The only existences that transcend the world of common sense are gods or devils. The world wouldn't be so unreasonable if god exists. Therefore, there is no god in this world. With that, the existence X right before me is the devil. Proving complete.

"....you people, do you really want to work your creator to death?"

¹ **Butterfly dream**, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhuangzi_\(book\)#.22The_Butterfly_Dream.22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhuangzi_(book)#.22The_Butterfly_Dream.22)

Once upon a time, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting about happily enjoying himself. He did not know that he was Zhou. Suddenly he awoke, and was palpably Zhou. He did not know whether he was Zhou, who had dreamed of being a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhou. Now, there must be a difference between Zhou and the butterfly. This is called the transformation of things.

You people? Plural is being used. Meaning that there are other people other than myself. Should I feel relieved at the fact that I have a lot of companions? A little subtle. Although I don't hate myself fundamentally, I don't really like it either.

"Recently there's a lot. Crazy insane souls like you people. Why not rely on humanity's evolution to seek salvation? Are you really that determined to not reach Nirvana?"

"Humanity evolved by the advancement of society right?"

John Rawls' Theory of Justice was very impressive. But there is no way to apply it practically. Humans are separated into haves and have nots. The "what if" in the theory might be interesting, but in reality, the haves will not give up their privilege for other people. Instead of worrying about the future, isn't it natural for humans to chase real interests? Even so, how to go about doing it is also a problem.

Let's say I'm dead, where does the soul go next? Let us proceed to have a bit more constructive discussion shall we? The things that happen later is more important.

"Return to the circle of life, till reincarnation."

The answer provided by the self proclaimed god, "X", was very naive. I see, I'm afraid this is the so called "I have done my part" responsibility right. One shouldn't get lazy in job the moment you see an opportunity. But I am also able to understand the importance of explaining responsibility and compliance obligations. Even if one was displeased, as a member of society, as a part of the organisation, one should understand about following the right formalities.

"Very good. Please do that."

In conclusion, I have decided to be cautious of my back in my next life. I have learnt that humans can be split into two kinds of people, one who follows rational action, and the other who doesn't, looks like there's a need to restudy behaviour economics.

"....I've had enough."

But, the words he muttered makes me feel slightly confused.

"Ah?"

"Can't you guys stop it already? Not even one of you, seeking salvation and Nirvana aside, you all don't even have the slightest faith."

Even you say that, I'm troubled too. Honestly, I don't understand what "X" (self proclaimed god) is angry about. I can understand that the elderly are more impatient, but once someone who has reached a certain status starts to rage, no one is going to be able to get used to it. If it's an anime or manga, it can still be laughed off as a joke, but in modern society, there are a lot of things that cannot be waved off by saying it was a prank.

"Recently, there are too many humans that stray off the path of common sense! Completely failing to tell right from wrong!"

About that... Even though I'm being reprimanded about what was common sense by "X", I'm worried too. To begin with, if there really is common sense in this world, could I trouble you to inform me first? It's asking a bit too much for people to obey something that they neither agreed to nor seen before. I am really unable to understand anything that is not spoken. Until now, I don't recall having some ESP ability.

"Didn't I set the 10 commandments!?"

First commandment, thou shalt have no other gods before me

Second commandment, thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Third commandment, remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy

Fourth commandment, honour thy father and thy mother.

Fifth commandment, thou shalt not kill

Sixth commandment, thou shalt not commit adultery

Seventh commandment, thou shalt not steal

Eighth commandment, thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour

Ninth commandment, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife

Tenth commandment, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wealth

These words through some kind of ESP abruptly passed into my brain. Um, about that, how should I put it, it's really difficult. Anyhow, I was born in a society of multiple religions, and was already used to sloppiness of religious tolerance. Even if you talk about the commandments to me, it only makes me feel confused. And not only do I respect my parents, at the same time I have never killed anyone before. From biological point of view I am a man, the sexual instinct I had, I'm born with it. These were the conditions I was gifted with, there was nothing I could do. I have nothing to say if I'm the one who designed this, but aren't you the one who designed it?

"That is my lifelong regret!"

I wonder how god's life looks like. From a simplistic technical point of view, I'm slightly interested. Anyway, this is the level of interest and curiosity I had for other things. I shouldn't have had the lust or urge to kill people. Ah, although while playing an FPS game, it does feel very cool to get a headshot, but this doesn't show that my killing urge is more than the average people. Also, I did take some poster regarding animal care, and urged the department of health to lower kill/catch rate back home.

"Even if you didn't do it, you still enjoying the action of killing right!"

I have neither stolen nor been a false witness, I have also never snatched another person's loved one as a hobby. Most importantly is that I'm always an honest person. Faithful to my duty, obeying the laws, I don't recall doing anything inhuman. If war broke out, I might even have a divine revelation to go prawn farming. Unfortunately my soldier experiences is only limited to online gaming.

"Enough! Since you wouldn't repent regardless, then I will have to give you an adequate punishment!"

There's a limit even when looking for trouble right. Why do I have to be the one who takes the punishment? But according to my experience, I know that ignoring this matter would be a bad idea.

"No, please wait."

"Silence!"

I hope you don't get angry. After all you are the so called almighty existence, you should be more mature mentally. Or even as a farce is also fine, please be a bit more mature. I knew a lawyer, although he looks like a different person in the courtroom compared to his online game persona, but he is still able to maintain a social life. I don't expect you to act as perfect as him, but at least slightly better...

"Just by managing a population of up to 7 billion, it's already making me overworked!"

You all must breed and reproduce, fill the earth—that is what was written in the bible. Judging from the limits of one's knowledge, I'm afraid that humans are obeying this teaching way too honestly. To a point that the image of Malthus worrying in the underworld appears in my mind. You could say that humans have reproduced too much. But as a manager, you should remember the instructions that you gave. It would be nice if you don't get looked down by your subordinates or be the next personnel to get sacked by the company. Anyway, since you are a manager, I hope you take responsibility of what you have said.

"This...if this world is full of faithless people like you, I'm already in deficit!"

Honestly speaking, doesn't this means that there is a flaw in this management model?

"Breaching the contract and you still dare to say these words! You all don't even want a chance at salvation right!"

No prior notice, how would I know. These are my heartfelt words. If it's something important, it is a common knowledge to send in a mail with a certified stamp. But if it's a contract, it should be handed over personally. It is best to make sure that the contract is kept properly.

"Didn't you all bow to atheism?"

No, as of now the evolution of science has no difference with magic anymore. Overdeveloped science is like magic. Natural science banzai! The world matters, which wouldn't have any more doubts. In this affluent world, as long as there is no urgent need, sense of crisis and faith will not be produced, so there is no need to seek something to rely on. After all, as long as humans don't fall into a dead end, there is no need to rely on religion.

"...In other words, it's about that right?"

Even if you say this or that, I wouldn't understand right. I can't help it if the way I treated "X" is becoming more and more casual. Only, being unable to have a normal conversation is quite troubling for me. What should I do? If there's a translation service available, I would immediately sign the hiring contract without any concern about the price.

"You are lacking in faith, is driven by your sexual lust, holds me in disregard, and completely ignores ethics."

I really felt like protesting. I'm not that bad, based on my manner of conducting ethics and the current level of social norms, it definitely is still above the average standards!

"Shut up! All of you are like this, despite wasting effort every time to return you all back to transmigration, but it always relapses immediately."

About that, that's why I said that this is an issue with the increase of human population. At least it's related to the lifespan of the entire human race. Now that we have the concept of an average lifespan. That, and also of course Malthusian theory of population. Didn't you read it? Human population would continue to increase like rats, pretty scary right. We didn't do anything special, you will understand after a simple analysis. This obviously shows that there is a flaw in this management model right.

"That can be made up just by increasing the faith right!"

Ugh, I already said this is a flaw in the management model. All I can say is, you are too naive in the psychological analysis of the consumers. You have already committed a structural error, way back during the planning stage.

"So the reason for the problem, according to you, is that living in a scientific world, is a man, not knowing what is war and having never fallen into any dead ends right?"

...Eh? I can't shake off a bad feeling about this one.

OK. Please calm down. The "X" right now, is as dangerous as those HR department employees who steal other company technical staff who they have trained from the

basics. I have the grasp of the situation and had also formulated an appropriate countermeasure.

"If that's the case, all I need to do is just throw you into that kind of environment and you will start to believe and have faith again?"

Err.. about that, don't you think you jump into conclusions too quickly? Please calm down. Indeed, I did mention about the excess progress of science cause faith to turn more ambiguous. But, dear god. Please don't be too impulsive. That's right, calm down first. So I say, as long as we are able to feel the blessings of god, it should be fine. About that, of course, I totally know about it. I completely understand why you manage us this way. That's right, I clearly understand this point, so could you put your hand down please? Also, saying I know nothing about war is a misunderstanding.

"It's too late to start bootlicking now!"

No please, my dear lord. Please recall a bit. This world has confirmed that magic and miracles do not exist, the people who claim that they have witnessed it is also really suspicious. It's the same as your existence! Also, sexual urges applies to both sexes right!

"That is enough. I understand. Let's do an experiment then."

"Eh?"

"With you as the subject!"

It was this sort of memory. Which I would really like to forget if it's possible.

[chapter]

I

第壹章

北辺の空

The Sky In Norden



CHAPTER 1

The Sky in Norden

C.E. 1923 June, Northern Military Region Norden Warzone/Third Defence Line

Why am I fighting a war in a place like this?

Holding an orb in her small hand and placing the rifle which was a substitute for a scepter on the ground, the consciousness known as Second Lieutenant Mage Tanya Degurechaff, bestowed with the ability to soar in the sky kept asking herself, “Why did things turn out this way?”

“Fairy08, paging Norden Control. I say again, Fairy08 paging Norden Control. Please respond.”

Floating in the gloomy sky of Norden was a black dot. Diving below the clouds while maneuvering was the airborne sorcery officer that is the pride of the imperial army —that was me, who was reincarnated into a little girl because of some sort of karma. The thing hanging from her military uniform and held in her hand was an item that used scientific methods to control paranormal phenomena, a Operation Orb that allows Mages to interfere with the world via their will. This was the modernization of an ancient orb using modern magic and science. As the name implies, it was a magically engineered catalyst that could decipher the world’s data.

The mission was to station herself at the altitude of 6000 feet high, maintain cruising speed, and perform artillery observation¹ in the designated airspace.

¹ A military **artillery observer** is responsible for directing artillery and mortar fire onto a target.

“Fairy08, this is Norden Control. Reading you loud and clear, your positional tracking is working normally.”

This was nothing, just a flight support mission at the Empire-Federation national borders. Only that the figure with a Operation Orb hung on her neck, while deploying flight magic and performing her observation duties looked surprisingly small. This was not a metaphor, she literally had a small body. She looked less than 10 years old. Even considering that she was female, her physique was still on the petite side. Compared to her outstanding physique in the past life, this height is really quite depressing for her. Speaking of the size of the aviation throat microphones¹, Tanya was mocked by others because her neck was too thin when she was issued her equipment. She felt so embarrassed back then.

¹ A **throat microphone**, is a type of contact microphone that absorbs vibrations directly from the wearer's throat by way of single or dual sensors worn against the neck.



“Fairy08 copy. Reached mission airspace. Reading you loud and clear.”

I have already given up on my voice, but this high-pitched voice always makes me feel uneasy. I'm used to it, but I still can't stand my own voice. My tongue isn't flexible so my words comes out with a lisp, shameful.

“Norden Control roger. Carry on with the assigned mission.”

You also have to give it to this army that doesn't care if I'm a small girl, and can't speak clearly. This situation was probably reasonable as aerial Mages only focus on air combat. The only standard that mattered was the users' capability for magic and fighting potential. In the eyes of the Empire who prioritizes this to the extreme, the age requirements for Mages were a relic of the past. Doesn't matter if you physically look like someone who needs to be cared for, you will still be sent to conduct artillery observation.

“Fairy08, acknowledge. No abnormality in warzone. I say again, no abnormality.”

“Norden Control copy. Your observation zone has been assigned to an artillery battalion. Designation: Goliath07. This arrangement will stand until you receive another order or the mission is completed. Over.”

The general allocation of human resources was based on the geopolitical needs of the Empire. For historical reasons, the Empire is located right in the middle of the continent, so they have had to think of their neighbouring countries as potential enemies. To defend their vast territory, their troop numbers were always a tricky topic. To resolve this problem, the conclusion painstakingly reached by headquarters was to efficiently use every resources available to them.

“Fairy08, this is the artillery battalion from the joint division, Goliath07, do you copy?”

Therefore, even if you are a just young girl, if you can be used, the army will dump her at the borders and order her to execute an aerial patrol mission. They were literally using child soldiers.

“Goliath07, this is Fairy08. Reading you loud and clear. I have visual on enemy infantry approaching. Telemetry¹ has been sent. Please acknowledge.”

It was a surreal image for a young girl to be making official reports in a cute voice while soaring in the sky. By the way, an orthodox army would consist of only normal adults. This was common sense.

The message might be muffled by interference, but hearing the voice of a young child from the signal set was normal for Mages. After all, exceptions were frequently given out of practicality in the armed forces. However, the most important thing was that the constant harshness of military duties had already burnt out the soldiers with conscience. They might feel concerned about young children fighting in war, but their senses were already dulled by the constant grind of their obligations.

“Goliath07 roger....conducting first ranging shot.”

And so, Flight Mage Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff, who was commissioned into the military, made periodic radio checks with practiced hands via the signal set that was as big as her back, performing her duties as a forward artillery observer in the northern plains of Norden. *To be honest, I do have complaints about why I am flying in such a place.*

“Confirming ranging shot... Confirmed target within shot range. Shot deviation less than 10 meters from target’s center. Please proceed with bombardment.”

¹ **Telemetry** is an automated communications process by which measurements are made and other data collected at remote or inaccessible points and transmitted to receiving equipment for monitoring.

“Goliath07 copy. Commencing fire mission.”

Despite the blue eyes that was relentlessly observing the situation in front, it was undeniable that there were flashes of frustration within them. *Why am I in this different world, turned back into a child, had my gender changed, and fighting a war?*

The thing that annoy me the most are the changes to my body. The body of a child is very inconvenient. Girls might develop faster than boys, but my senses are attuned to a larger body, and the size difference is excessive. And ever since I enlisted into the army, I’ve had plenty of experiences that remind me that I am now just a powerless child.

Being incapable of using a rifle... They’re too big, so I can’t aim properly, and my shoulder will hurt from the recoil. During melee combat training, I was thrown around by others with a sympathetic face.

That was until I understood with the Operation Orb that the world is structured by three vector forces, and I learnt the technique to interfere the data of this world. Before that, I had to rely on weak, uncoordinated arms and legs struggling upon the bare earth.

After putting in tremendous effort, I became skilled in magic techniques that were reliant on thinking instead of my physical body. If I can fly through the air and interfere with reality through magic, I won’t need to be troubled by the restrictions of this petite body.

The strange sensation of using magic is solved with a convenient item. However, possessing such an item doesn’t mean we should use them, right?

I see, ICBMs¹ have to be used when necessary. So there is the need to do maintenance, to train and be prepared to launch it during peacetime. Speaking of which, is there any reason that necessitates the use of an ICBM? It was because of the deterioration of relations between the Empire and its surrounding country, which isn't a recent event.

A long time ago, the Empire and the Federation had an unofficial dispute over the drawing of the national border. At least on the platform of international politics, neither parties argued over the ownership of the territory in question.

But this was only because of the overwhelming strength that the Empire had; that's why this problem was kept from surfacing. For Tanya, this situation was actually very simple, it was the same reason why the smaller nations wouldn't enter into border disputes with the Soviet Union by themselves.

...The past could only be discussed using past tense, which was the only regrettable thing.

A few coincidental events happened at the border. The border garrisons from both nations misfired accidentally, and firefights broke out because of some misunderstanding. These issues could be resolved by the commanders on the ground, but it was clear the situation was becoming tense.

If the Empire moved into pre-war footing early, Tanya would be able to retreat to the rear lines and be assigned to non-combat duties. After all, before the battle began, Warrant Officer Tanya Degurechaff was just a cadet officer from Officer Cadet School. Trainees would just be a burden on the frontlines. And so, if the Empire had been able to recognize the situation and make timely preparations, Tanya could have looked forward to her transfer to a research unit or work as an administrator in the rear.

¹ An **intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)** is a guided ballistic missile with a minimum range of more than 5,500 kilometres (3,400 mi) primarily designed for nuclear weapons delivery.

However, high command ignored the turbulent situation and judged it to be simply brinksmanship¹, resulting in Tanya's deployment to this place for a military training exercise. This was just an extension of the training she did in Officer Cadet School (OCS), a joint exercise with the army while keeping to her flight patrol route. But after losing her chance to retreat to the rear lines, Tanya was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant after the exercise and deployed for combat.

The call sign given to her was [Fairy08]. The call sign, "Fairy", irked her. Appearance wise, she was just a short child — no, a loli. She had blue eyes showing strong determination and short blond hair that was easy to care for. Considering her white pristine skin, this name suited her.

After receiving her call sign and officially joining the border garrison, Tanya was assigned to the unit made up of the OCS training branch and local forces. Her first duty was a mandatory 48-hour standby order. She thought she would be sent for training as usual after the formation of the unit to confirm the team members response time and functionality, but she was forced to standby in full battle gear. That happened about 24 hours ago.

Following that, with a timing that would make the devil smile, emergency reports came from the outposts at the frontlines. They warned that there were signs of a large scale Federation military invasion.

The Federation's changes in policies were what the Empire dreaded. Due to the change in political regime and the installation of new leaders, the rise of nationalism demanded a huge shift in national policies. To be honest, not just Tanya, but everyone in the Empire's military found it hard to understand why they chose this time to start a reckless military campaign. Before they knew it, the

¹ **Brinkmanship** is the practice of trying to achieve an advantageous outcome by pushing dangerous events to the brink of active conflict. It occurs in international politics, foreign policy, labour relations, and (in contemporary settings) military strategy involving the threat of nuclear weapons, and high-stakes litigation.

Federation had already issued an ultimatum for the Empire's forces to withdraw, in lieu of a declaration of war.

They demanded for the 'Empire forces to leave their national borders within 24 hours'.

The circumstances of the Federation weren't something a mere Lieutenant could fathom. However, since border skirmishes were 'politically sensitive', it was obvious the Empire wanted to avoid war from officially breaking out. But failing to see the facts for what they are would make them infamous in the history books.

The infamy of being known as idiots. Maybe the Federation had some strategy to seize victory up their sleeves?

Although the Empire could not understand the objective and intent of the Federation, they followed the plans laid out by their country, mobilizing the cautious bureaucracy and military arm in preparations for the theoretical attack that might happen theoretically. For Tanya who was a cog in the war machine, she only did her job as expected of her pay grade. At this point of time, she still thought optimistically that, "Well, this is probably just a political maneuver."

After all, the neighbouring Union would probably object to military operations occurring so close to it and call for a ceasefire or restrain both sides through intimidation. The Kingdom and Republic that gave aid to the Federation in the past would fear that their past efforts to help them would be lost, and would stop the Federation's suicidal campaign. That's right, this was what most of the soldiers thought would happen. After all, soldiers are all pragmatists.

It was clear the Federation had no chance of victory if they fought the Empire head on, so one of these countries would call for a cessation of hostility, leaving the clean up to the politicians and diplomats of both nations.

However, something that was unfathomable to all except for the Federation happened.

“Federation forces are advised to lower your arms and surrender or retreat.”

Going by the common sense of the Empire, this was a shocking advisory. The Empire might be watching the situation develop in disbelief, but the reports of the Federation trespassing borders wasn't completely unexpected. The fact that it was really happening was what was baffling to them. According to after-action logs, the soldier Lehrgen, serving at the military headquarters said, “...It would be easier to comprehend if it was all just a show orchestrated by their military high command, that's how unfathomable the intentions of the Federation were,” to express how confounding this incident was.

Putting their doubts aside, the pragmatic Empire immediately issued the command to stop the grand scale invasion by Federation forces. They might be confused or troubled by the Federation's intent, but when they learned of the possibility of open warfare, the Empire started logistical and battle preparations as per standing orders. Forces from the regiments deployed in various parts of the Empire were mustered by rail, showcasing the smooth and efficient organization of the Empire military, lauded as the reason for their might.

Despite gathering large amounts of resources and mobilizing units, the Empire still couldn't shake off the doubt and worry in their heart: “Are they for real?”

In the league of powerful nations, the Empire's armed forces were far ahead of the others. Even during peacetime, a field army would be garrisoned in the borders in the name of national security. Right now, in preparation for war, an ad hoc army was formed on top of that by mobilizing troops that weren't part of the garrisoned forces. They even considered information warfare and invited presses from other countries as a counter measure, covering all the angles. That's why the Empire was so doubtful— “Were they going to attack for real?”

For Tanya, she would never even dream about the day the Federation would march on the military powerhouse without any just cause, and doing so with an inferior force in front of international media.

But in this world, fact was stranger than fiction. For Tanya, it was inconceivable how the situation developed into such a stage. Putting it crudely, it was like seeing the suicidal impulse turn physical in an instant.

“War is breaking out! I say again, war is breaking out! The war started just now! Because we were invaded, the Empire has declared against the Legedonia Federation! Earlier today, Federation forces invaded Empire territory from several areas; in retaliation, the imperial forces are counterattacking and heading for the borders! According to reports, our forces have engaged the enemy on multiple fronts!”

With armoured units as the main corps, all allied forces were being mobilized. At the same time, war correspondents from the media were shouting with panic as they send reports coming in from the various battlefronts to the entire world via radio waves.

*... Since victory is assured, is that why information warfare is necessary? *sigh* Since our gross national product, technology, and military are miles ahead of them, taking preemptive actions by assuming our victory would be an obvious move.*

Permitting the presence of the media before the war started meant that high command knew they had the leisure of promoting their cause. Showing the might and righteousness of the Empire was a good political move. They had already proven the other party was the first to cross national borders, so they had the *casus belli* to act. They probably allowed the media to follow the troops to showcase the victorious battle. National leaders that would allow the media to cover a military defeat was a fictional existence in this alternate world as well. Having minimal classification of reports was a sign that things were going well.

These were all reasons why Tanya wasn't nervous. To be honest, when she heard that she would be thrown into the north for a training exercise, she wanted to scream to the heavens, "Please give divine retribution to this militaristic nation that forced a prepubescent girl to the dangerous front lines, and the existence [X] who threw a kind-hearted man into this world!"

However, if the battle was one-sided like the Gulf War, it would be a chance for her to secure a great future and there wouldn't be any problems. She would be fighting a war her side would win, staying in the army that would win, and attack the enemy safely from the sky. A simple mission that would advance her career. This was unexpected, but it wasn't a bad thing. No, it was a golden opportunity. Border patrols were boring and dangerous; even if you accomplished something, it might easily be ignored because of 'political considerations'. Thanks to this, patrol missions in the conflict-prone zone of Norden was a thankless task.

It was hard to accumulate merits here, and as if to remind her of how bad the situation was, Tanya's appearance was that of a blond child with fair skin. Her experience was that of an OCS graduate, a young Mage that had a bright future ahead. Even if her commanders were willing to use her, they would suffer infamy as the one who destroyed the bright future of a child if anything was to happen to Tanya. Her abilities aside, just her doll-like appearance would feel out of place. Even Tanya herself wouldn't want anything to do with someone looking like that unless it involved herself or official duties.

That was her objective view after being commissioned in the Empire military. Although her instructors gave her good reviews, just doing tasks expected of her pay grade made it hard to dispel the unflattering name of 「Loli Mage」. Hence, the only way was to strive for great accomplishments. But even if she wanted to do so, she didn't have the chance to do so all this while. In other words, she was a "Mage", but wasn't treated like one. She was treated just like a baby that would get in the way. Being called an inferior product without considering her experience and situation was humiliating.

The ironic thing was that during a battle in which the Empire had the overwhelming advantage, Tanya was given a chance to buff her resume; she was unexpectedly lucky.

She would be able to participate in this war in great condition. If that was the case, she hoped to obtain the authority and status that would allow her to survive, and to build her social network. In order to do that, she had to be active in this war and earn merits.

When she thought about it that way, Tanya felt that the situation wasn't that bad after all, unconsciously relaxing her bright red lips.

“No, isn't this the best thing for my resume?... It isn't a bad thing.”

No one could hear her quiet mutters. Even if someone was flying near her, her words would probably be covered by the screams of the Empire's artillery and the impact of the shells. If Tanya pretended that she was observing a display that was several times larger than the Fuji Combined Firepower Exercise¹, she wouldn't feel that depressed.

“Fairy08, this is Goliath07. Please report the effect of the bombardment.”

“Goliath07, this is Fairy08. The bombardment is effective. I say again, the bombardment is effective.”

It was a simple job of observing the results and forwarding the telemetry to the artillery. Using flying spells while lugging a radio signal set wasn't easy, but the Operation Orb issued by the Empire army were excellent. For a potential conflict zone like Norden, many of the units situated in these northern lands were dispatched from central headquarters. Even Tanya herself was from central , at

¹ Exhibition of the military prowess of the Japan Self Defence Force performed near in Japan, Fuji.

least on paper, and was assigned into a temporary unit after she was sent here for a training exercise.

If she performs her duties diligently, she will make it back to central one day and being assigned to an administrative role would no longer be a dream. If she got selected to be the an Mage officer escort for the administrative department, she might be tasked with the defence of the imperial capital and stay far behind the frontlines. Looking at it from another angle, this was an experience that would help her career tremendously, an assignment she should be grateful for.

When Tanya learned that she would be sent to the boring and dangerous north for a training exercise, she hated her instructor to death. However, it was hard to tell in life if you were unlucky or not. It was a bit late, but she should find some time soon to report on her situation and thank him. Social networks had to be maintained properly.

I am looking forward to the rose coloured life of the elites after all. Tanya was in a good mood as she took part in the battle by observing the shelling of the warzone.

“Norden Control, this is Fairy08.”

“This is Norden Control, reading you loud and clear, over.”

The shells exploding before her eyes successfully dealt critical damage to the infantry units. Although Norden was a mountainous area with undulating landscape, wandering carelessly into enemy territory when their artillery was in position only made the Federation forces easy targets. On top of that, it was a terrain without any cover.

“Fairy08, acknowledged. We are suppressing them right now. I conclude that they are suppressed. The enemy units are falling into disarray.”

The well prepared artillery fired on soft targets¹ from an adequate distance with the guidance of artillery observers on grounds they had already mapped out. It would be harder to *not* obliterate the enemy. She watched the group of people who used to be soldiers scampering around and falling to the shells' shrapnel easily. From what she was seeing from her binoculars, Tanya judged that it would be a waste of shells to continue the bombardment.

“Fairy08, Norden control, acknowledged. Push forward to the second defence line and direct our forces to the main enemy infantry body. We will suppress them with direct fire, over.”

“Fairy08 wilco. Proceeding now, continuing observation mission, over.”

Conversing calmly with the control tower made Tanya think that, “the radio is working unexpectedly well in a real battle,” and how free the sky was from radio interference. Reflected in her blue eyes was a cloudy sky, but the weather would definitely not cause radio interference. The signal was crystal clear. So clear that Tanya thought she looked dumb carrying the extra large signal set because she thought the signal would be distorted because of the lodes in Norden. In order to locate the enemy remnants that were still resisting, Tanya flew over the routed Federation forces. As she push ahead as ordered, she felt really confused.

What was the Federation thinking?

If they wanted to conduct a live fire exercise, why not just request for one? If she knew fighting them was easier than shooting a turkey, on the level of shooting dodos, she should have rejected the observation mission and volunteered for air to ground assault missions. In a sure win battle, air to ground bombardment not only assured air superiority and protected aircraft, you can pick and choose the most valuable target to hit. She was so envious of them.

¹ **Soft Targets**, Targets that are very vulnerability to artillery, such as trucks, infantry in the open and light buildings.

“Norden control, this is Fairy08. I have arrived at the destination, over.”

“Norden control acknowledged. Also confirmed on our end. Sending tactical updates to artillery units. Please proceed with artillery observation, over.”

“Fairy08 roger. Will carry on with artillery observation until advised otherwise, over.”

“Norden Control acknowledge, out.”



**On the same day,
The skies above the Federation in Northland.**

God, why, why is this happening?

Because his tanned lean face was twisted in agony from the reflection of the snow, Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.) Anson Suez couldn't help turning his face skywards. In the sky he was so familiar with due to his work as a Federation Mage, there were the echoes of the Empire's artillery bombardment in full force. The scene before him was a one-sided battle. No, any soldier with common sense won't call this a battle, but a massacre. In a hilly region with no cover and only slight undulation in terrain, they not only moved their unarmoured vehicles in, but even the infantry was marching in. They were heading into an area defended by heavy enemy artillery as if they were at a parade.

“This... this is different from what I was told! They opened fire!” “I need backup! Hurry hurry!” “Retreat! On the double! Make a smoke screen!” “It's gone! My arm

is gone!” “Air support is still not here...” “HQ, HQ, please respond! Please respond!”

The place named by the Empire as the ‘national border’, which the Federation called the ‘temporary demilitarized zone’, was the national border drawn according to the Londinum Protocol¹. If they crossed this zone carelessly to launch a direct attack on the heavily defended Empire base, such a result was to be expected. It didn’t matter what those politicians were thinking, but the radio chatter was evidence that the soldiers in the warzone were paying the price of the hopeless policy... with their lives.

“...Those damn politicians!”

The sluggish economy, the widening wealth inequality and the unemployment rate that refused to fall... the internal issues the Federation government were facing meant they might be ousted after losing the trust of the people. The current regime was paying the price and was recklessly fanning the waves of nationalism and chauvinism. No, what was frightening was the next step. War, a war they had no chance of winning.

That was the reason why Lt. Col. Anson was cursing the group refusing to face reality, the dumbass politicians that were still fanning the fire of nationalism.

The Londinium Protocol was mediated by the Kingdom, allowing the Empire and Federation to resolve their national border dispute by compromising and recognizing a common national boundary. It was officially named a temporary demilitarized zone, and was confirmed by the executive government of both nations as a de facto national border; but in order to appease the Federation who

¹ **Londinum Protocol**, based on London Protocol, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Protocol

On 21 June 1814, a secret convention between the Great Powers: United Kingdom, Prussia, Austria, and Russia awarded the territory of current Belgium and the Netherlands to William I of the Netherlands, then "Sovereign Prince" of the United Netherlands.

claimed this land as part of their nation, the treaty became a “temporary” protocol that “respects” the claims of both sides.

“They said this would just be a slightly tense hike!”

Putting it simply, the Federation was free to proclaim their right to this land within their country, but the international view was that this protocol was as good as recognizing this place as the Empire’s territory. No matter how loud the idealists in their country claim this to be an official conflict zone and that the Federation had rights to this land, it was just the whimpers of a loser in the eyes of the international community.

“They said this is just a hike! They dared say this is just a hike!”

Just a patrol by the Federation army within our own sovereign lands? This was not a joking matter. Those damn politicians seemed to have unwittingly convinced themselves their political slogan was fact. I really hope someone can tell me this is just a bad joke.

That government spokesman... Or rather, that bunch of wage thieves who kept broadcasting nonsensical political propaganda. They actually had the nerves to hold a press conference and announce this was just a “highly organized and tense hike.” A reckless judgement that was absolutely stunning.

“Cunningham! Where’s the remnants of our ally forces?”

“I can’t contact them, Colonel Suez. The radio network is chaotic and deteriorating, it’s difficult to grasp the situation...”

Their allied forces were in disarray. This was expected. After crossing the borders with the belief that there wouldn’t be a battle, they were ravaged by the full might

of the Imperial army. No one could keep their cool in such a scenario. This foolish maneuver would probably be immortalized in the history books.

“What about the command post? Either the Forward Air Control (FAC) or Tactical Operation Center is fine. Can you contact the command post?”

“The network is jammed from crosstalk¹... Forget about command post, even the frequency channel is wrong.”

First Lieutenant Cunningham who was operating the long distance radio set on his back with a sour face was one of the top veterans in Anson’s unit. While flying in this familiar sky, they were stymied by crosstalk even a veteran couldn’t resolve. This meant the Federation’s military campaign was definitely launched carelessly. If this wasn’t happening to his own country, Anson would be confounded by the stupidity of it all.

“Launching a cross-border campaign without moving into full war-footing², this is unbelievable. This is definitely brinksmanship by the Federation government. If they weren’t sure that the Empire didn’t have the resolve to declare war, this would be an impossibly dangerous game.”

The words of the Empire’s army headquarter’s spokesperson he read in the newspaper two days ago told him everything. He mentioned that this was merely military activity to gauge the Empire’s reaction to the Federation’s brinksmanship. The comments of the spokesperson, who looked as if he had eaten some bitter

¹ In electronics, **crosstalk** is any phenomenon by which a signal transmitted on one circuit or channel of a transmission system creates an undesired effect in another circuit or channel. Crosstalk is usually caused by undesired capacitive, inductive, or conductive coupling from one circuit, part of a circuit, or channel, to another.

² **War Footing**, The condition or status of a military force or other organization when operating under a state of war or as if a state of war existed.

gourd, were rational. After all, no one would dare launch a military campaign that might decide the fate of a nation without any preparation.

“Short-range comms are fine too. Just contact the ground forces directly. We will support our surviving forces in their retreat.”

“Yes, sir.”

It was hard to say if Anson’s wing¹ was lucky or not. Due to a series of unofficial skirmishes near the borders, they were re-drawn to the rear to reorganize when the Federation crossed the border. With their effective strength reduced to squadron level, they were almost at the stage where they would need to return to the capital to reform the unit. As Lt. Col. Anson had participated in numerous battles without official records, he misread the situation... He thought by allowing his unit to retreat, this meant that the campaign was just political propaganda as usual and the government had no intention of going to war.

As a frontline unit and special forces of the Federation, Anson and his group was probably thinking of the most vicious way to describe the incompetence of the politicians. They already knew that their government was a coalition of morons, but they didn’t expect them to do something so hopeless and idiotic.

“Sorry, Dahton, can you try contacting our sister units? I want to grasp the situation as well as possible.”

And so, since they have lost all initiative, Anson could only do what he can to support the retreat of allied forces under heavy fire from a despairingly superior force. With the Forward Air Control uncontactable, they couldn’t rely on command support and the situation had turned into chaos. This unit was meant to ensure that

¹ In most Commonwealth air forces, as well as some others, a **wing** is usually made up of three or four squadrons.

the Mages and other air units could cooperate with the ground forces on a very basic level.

“If there is a need, we will link up with the rest of our wing. If the flights¹ can’t rejoin their squadron, it is fine for them to form temporary squadrons².”

“Colonel, I got through!”

Snatching the communication set into his hand and a short conversation later, Anson understood that the situation below was a hopeless mess. Using a peacetime command structure for war was a mistake, and the price they paid was the total collapse of the chain of command. This was obvious to everyone.

“I got it. In short, we can’t regain command or fight a war. The only thing we can do is to minimize the suppression artillery strikes that are creating more chaos.”

That was why the situation had deteriorated so much that each unit had to act on their own instead of staging an organized resistance. Even if they could somehow contact ally forces, they couldn’t find units that could grasp the situation and take the necessary countermeasures.

“I understand. However, the defence of the artillery is probably very strong... How about targeting the artillery observer?”

¹ A **flight** is a military unit in an air force, naval air service, or army air corps. It usually comprises three to six aircraft.

² A **squadron** in air force, army aviation, or naval aviation is mainly a unit comprising a number of military aircraft and their aircrews, usually of the same type, typically with 12 to 24 aircraft, sometimes divided into three or four flights, depending on aircraft type and air force.

And so, based on the forces the Lt. Col. had on hand, the most effective means of support was to disrupt the bombardment indirectly by neutralizing the enemy artillery observers. That was the only conclusion they could come up with.

“Colonel Suez! Message from the 6th division. Both observer and signaller are still alive!”

“Excellent! Confirm with them whether they can locate the enemy observer now.”

But then, communication with a retreating allied unit that managed to maintain command turned things around.

“... Bingo! Telemetry received!”

Multiple Mage observers were flying alone without concealing their positions. Based on the periodic encrypted signals they sent, they must be making reports of their observations and was using special, encrypted frequencies.

“They are flying alone? They’re really looking down on us.”

“That might be so, but their defensive line is very strong.”

Anson knew that of course. An air defence network that was properly set up, with air units and Mages ready to intercept. Security was so tight, it could make a grown man cry. It was clear that the Empire only allowed their support units to fly alone because they judged their defence network to be sturdy enough.

“*Sigh* I really don’t want to rack my brains and fight the enemy normally. I would have fled with my family if I had known earlier.”

“Colonel Suez, those Empire fellows probably have the opposite reaction from us, and are tilting their heads from confusion. They must be wondering if it is alright to fight such an easy war.”

“Indeed, let us pray they have dropped their guard.”

Anson could only pray to the gods with bitter thoughts.

... Oh god, just what did we do wrong?



Her assigned mission was important but boring. She just needed to carry the signal set and the full set of reconnaissance equipment to observe the bombardment. The processing of the telemetry was handled by the artillery units. Command was issued by the controller in Norden control tower.

And this was a battle they will definitely win, so she just needed to admire the laudable skills of the Empire’s artillery forces that rained down fragmentation and explosive shells repeatedly. The Empire was a military power that rose to prominence amongst the great powers recently. Supporting its renowned army was its relatively new equipment, and its orthodox pursuit of firepower.

The belief of the Empire was that “bayonets don’t lie, and neither do numbers.” That was why artillery was the 'God of battle' in the Empire. Even for Tanya, compared to the suspicious entity claiming to be god, the god of battle was a more reliable and absolute existence.

Even though our forces were doubtful of conflict, we still dutifully made preparations for war. Which means not only air superiority, but even the anti-Mage surveillance net was set up perfectly. Be it a spark of resistance or the flash

of anti-air guns, you just need to tell on them to the god of battle, and it will incur a suppressing barrage from the artillery to pulverise them.

This job was safe and meaningful, and would earn good reviews. How she wished she could do this all the time. After all, this was a VIP seat to watch the process of friendly forces gradually obtaining victory. Comparatively speaking, the Fuji Combined Firepower Exercise was like kids playing with cute steel beads.

Watching the scene of the enemy being defeated from the safe sky, there was no way I would feel unhappy about it. Artillery till the land and then the infantry and armour push forth. The ones providing ground cover and direct air support are us, the Mages. Flying at high altitude were the hybrid fighter jets and bombers unit led the way as the advance party. The entire battle was developing even more smoothly than a training exercise. Cheers to headquarters for coming up with this beautiful battle plan. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to advance my career in such a safe and simple manner.

It is thoughtless of me, I have to apologize to General Lee who said, "it is well that war is so terrible, otherwise we should grow too fond of it," because I feel that war is so much fun.

"Fairy08, this is Norden Control. Artillery is beginning ranging shots. Please report."

"This is Fairy08, confirming shots are on target. Uploading data. Concluding that adjustment is not needed. I say again, no need to adjust. Fire for effect."

The most amazing thing was how well the artillery was working with the data. To score a hit with just the ranging shots showed how well trained they were. Or rather, the Empire's reputation of being a military superpower wasn't just for show. Thanks to this, Tanya had an easy time working, which was great.

“Norden Control, acknowledged. Be careful of stray rounds. Bombardment will begin in two-zero-zero seconds. Over.”

“Fairy08, acknowledged. Out.”

Tanya increased her altitude slightly as she kept her distance and moved towards the west. She didn't think the artillery strike would be off target, but she would be hit if there were any mistakes, and it would be a tragedy if she was done in by friendly fire. On top of that, a full bombardment attack had an amazing amount of shells. The artillery fired without hesitation, while Tanya watched with envy while biting her fingers. In order to work happily together, she must not inconvenience the other party.

The artillery began their bombardment, raining down a cruel amount of iron shells, far exceeding the amount shown in any of the war movies Tanya had seen. She looked down from the sky and saw black spots pouring onto the ground like stars of a galaxy, exploding into intense flames, and turning the objects known as humans into dust.

“Fairy08 to Norden Control. Confirmed shots on target, please continue firing.”

“Norden Control, sending warzone updates. AO (area of operation) Alpha... Zone bzzz... bzzz—”

“Norden Control, this is Fairy08, you are breaking up, heavy interference. Over.”

This might be electromagnetic interference or simply an equipment issue. *This is a critical moment, spare me from that.* When Tanya was about to contact the controller again to test the signal set on her back, she received an unexpected message.

“Cherub leader, emergency war zone alert! Saying again, emergency war zone alert! Confirmed a large number of bogeys approaching!”

A warning that was different from periodic radio checks, it was an alert about unidentified aircraft. The strange thing was that the Forward Air Control on the front line was issuing the warning to the war zone. In an engagement with enemy units, such alerts wouldn't be given to the entire war zone unless the first defence line was broken. That was the hidden meaning behind the warning.

Was it powerful enemy reinforcements? But that's how war is; nothing goes according to plan.

“... Norden Control to all airborne security forces. Switch ROE¹ from border patrol to anti-guerilla attacks. Saying again, switch ROE from border patrol to anti-guerilla attack.”

When radio communications resumed, she received this sudden order to engage the enemy. This was obvious, since enemy aircraft was inbound, there was no choice but to engage. To prevent such incident from happening, the Empire not only set up a strong defence line in their forward position, they had also scrambled reserve units as their security forces.

“Large number of heat signatures detected from bogeys! Spell interference detected! Targets identified to be Bandits (Mages)! The enemy is opening fire! Please neutralize targets immediately!”

The last message gave Tanya an ominous feeling. This might be the enemies' death throes, but the situation was rather dangerous.

¹ **Rules of Engagement (ROE)** are rules or directives to military forces(including individuals) that define the circumstances, conditions, degree, and manner in which the use of force, or actions which might be construed as provocative, may be applied.

“Norden Control to all stations. Saying again, Norden Control to all stations.”

It wasn't obvious from the controller's tone, but he had a hint of anxiety in his voice. He could read out the loss of allied aircraft calmly like a news reporter, so if even this guy was feeling anxious, the situation must be beyond dire.

“We have confirmed Mages on the scale of a wing crossing the border. Saying again, confirmed a Mage wing is breaching our defence lines.”

The Forward Air Controller read out the shocking situation update with a slightly troubled voice. Logically speaking, committing combat forces in batches was a taboo in military operations. Ensuring the reserve forces were utilized effectively was a crucial point in planning, but at the same time, commanders have to ensure they have enough reserve forces for tactical usage. The dilemma between these two issues date back to ancient times, but was also the most difficult problem to solve.

Going by common sense, sending infantry across the border without support and only throwing in units to cover their forces was inconceivable. Even Tanya didn't expect the Federation to send in their reserves when the Empire was about to switch to the offensive and pursue the enemy forces. If they were going to commit units, by battle logic, they should have done so earlier. However, that was why the Empire didn't expect this move.

“All units engage the enemy on contact! I say again, engage immediately!”

After routing the enemy, while they were adjusting the position and movement of the artillery, they were met with the counterattack by a wing of enemy Mages. The

Empire army did think this might happen, but they had just concluded the enemy main forces had been destroyed¹.

Normally, if they wanted to support the withdrawal of their allies, they should have acted faster. The unexpected enemy reinforcement probably threw a wrench into the Empire's front line. Tanya was just thinking she couldn't accumulate merits which would affect her career advancement in her position. However, right now she was glad to be assigned to the back.

If she was in the airborne security force, she would need to intercept immediately; but as an artillery observer, she didn't need to go over.

“... Bzzz... Bzzz—”

However, at the moment she was feeling lucky, Tanya's signal with Norden Control tower was full of interference. He was reporting on the sudden change in situation just a moment ago. The radio signal was making static at such a critical juncture.

Considering the signals breaking up before that, there was a high chance the signal set was malfunctioning. Be it directing artillery fire or receiving updates from friendly forces, the radio set would be very important and this would likely be a malfunction with serious consequences. From what Tanya remembered, the signal set she was using was used extensively by her in all sorts of exercises. It was known for its ruggedness and shouldn't be that fragile.

Maybe the problem only arise because it was a real battle, but not only would she be unable to report back on artillery fire, she would also be unable to complete her mission due to the mechanical error, which was unsettling. In the end, Tanya hadn't the mood to be frustrated over her signal set glitching.

¹ **Destroy**, Degrade enemy unit and put them permanently out of action (rule of thumb: inflict up to 50% losses)

...A *heat signature*?— Tanya noticing that she was being sniped was pure coincidence. However, she trusted her instincts, changed her flight course and barely avoided the attack.

Right after that, she saw numerous spells exploding in her original path. It was an enemy Mage.

“Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Fairy08 to Norden Control! I say again, Fairy08 to Norden Control! Enemy contact, requesting immediate support!”

The interference was caused by the enemy, not the signal set acting up. To counter this, Tanya increased radio wave output to maximum and started yelling.

Amongst the remaining enemy forces, their Mages were the biggest threat. In terms of Mages, the Federation was late to adopt their use and had a limited number of them. However, to make up for this weakness, they focused on strengthening their quality. They were able to achieve this because of the backing of countries that opposed the Empire. Afterall, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Tanya and the Empire’s Mages let down their guard for this battle because the enemy Mage units were supposedly reorganizing in the rear lines. According to intelligence reports, the enemy elite Mages were rushing to Eliance that was further to the north. This led to the strategic miscalculation, assuming that enemy Mages were not present.

This counterattack caught the Empire off guard. No matter what, an enemy force that required the immediate notification of the command post appeared before Tanya. This was of grave importance, tactically and politically. Naturally, she reported in as per standard procedure, but she had no plans of fighting the enemy

alone like a hero. *Let those seeking death die, living on is the most important thing.*
The issue was how she could escape this crisis.

“Detected enemy Mage units, squadron size, approaching fast.”

Tanya prepared for aerial battle as she shouted at the signal set, her eyes capturing multiple figures flying at high speed. Disgustingly many of them.

“Coordinates, AO Alpha, zone 8, altitude 4300!”

She didn’t know about the enemy’s troubles or political motives, but they were full of fighting spirit. The way they were refusing to give in despite their forces’ imminent defeat as they charged ahead while screaming intensely was troubling. Being diligent enemy soldiers, they probably wasn’t bothered about causing trouble for us.

On the grand scale of things the Empire was still gradually winning. It was a war they would certainly win. And that was why the situation was dire. While the Empire was in the process of winning a total victory, if her unit was to be defeated, they would be the only blemish in this battle.

“The only ones to suffer a loss while everyone else wins.”

Tanya was afraid that this would leave a irrefutable taint on her records— She was afraid of being treated like an incompetent person unable to complete her task. If the possibility existed, the situation before her was frightening. She didn’t have the right to refuse if her superiors ordered her to engage.

She focused on reactive, evasive actions. Her smaller body could lessen the g-force¹ slightly, but if she needed to dodge all the spells coming at her from all directions simultaneously, the burden would rise to another level.

From the amount of shots coming at her, it was at least one flight? No, it might be an elite detachment. Going by tactical theory, they were trying to restrain Tanya's movement and then attack her. The objective of the enemy being tying up Tanya was obvious.

Their main strategic target was definitely her allied artillery batteries that were without air cover. The enemy squadron aimed to break through the defences and ravage the Empire's support fire unit. Considering the strategic gains and risk involved, it was a profitable move. It was bad news no matter how Tanya sliced it.

It wouldn't be so bad if the Empire was using mobile artillery², but most of the batteries needed to be towed. Even for the Empire, the burden of forming the armoured divisions, Mage units and air force was heavy, and it would be too much to convert completely into mobile artillery. For the slow and heavy towed artillery, the time for them to run or hide was too despairingly short.

They would need units to cover them directly, but to stop the attack of a Mage squadron, it would require a squadron of their own. Simply put, Tanya needed to stall for time before the cover unit arrives.

“Engaging!”

“Norden Control to Fairy08! Report the situation!”

¹ **g-force** (with *g* from *gravitational*) is a measurement of the type of acceleration that causes weight. This notation is commonly used in aviation, especially in acrobatic or combat military aviation, to describe the increased forces that must be overcome by pilots in order to remain conscious.

² **Mobile artillery** is artillery equipped with its own propulsion system to move towards its target.

Fortunately, our side started counter electronic warfare measures and communications returned to normal. But look, they came as expected. My instinct for detecting trouble is a hundred percent accurate. Is the intuition of a woman so accurate? Outward appearance aside, I have no plans of being a woman. What is this annoying feeling?

“This is Fairy08, engaging enemy. I say again, engaging enemy. Enemy squadron is infiltrating my airspace.”

“Norden Control roger. Proceed to engage and begin stalling tactics. Gather as much intelligence as possible.”

Ah, what did I say? This is the worst. Engage and collect intelligence? No, I have to stall the enemy before that? Harrass an entire squadron alone? In the open sky without any cover? If you are sending me to die, just tell me straight.

“Enemy forces greatly outnumber me, requesting reinforcements.”

“Norden Control acknowledged. Allied Mage flight has been scrambled. Airborne security squadron is also on your way, ETA (estimated time of arrival) 600 seconds.”

What did you say? That they'll will take ten minutes? That's enough time to warm up a quick meal, finish it, and dispose of the garbage. Come on, it's impossible for me to stall them for ten minutes.

The most important thing is my life, and the only option is to run away. This is natural; I am not patriotic enough to fight a grand solo battle. But to avoid being branded as someone who flees before the enemy, I need a proper reason to do so. I will need a superior to judge that there is no strategic value in this airspace and order me to retreat.

“Fairy08 to Norden Control. Requesting permission to disengage immediately. I say again, requesting permission to disengage immediately.”

“Norden Control to Fairy08. Regrettably, permission denied. Please stall for time before friendly quick-reaction forces arrive on-site.”

Ah— damn jerk. Please serve divine retribution to the pogue¹ who doomed me with his orders! I really want to shout in his face— “Why not trade places with me? If you want to give unreasonable commands, then demonstrate for me to see.”

“Fairy08 to Norden control. Please advise the situation of allied artillery unit.”

Complaints aside, I am still an adult. I understand the consequences if I act out because of my body’s physical age. It’s not too late to take revenge after I make it big. In order to take revenge in the future, I need to handle the present situation perfectly.

“Mage Tanya Degurechaff will do her duty even in the most dire of situations”— getting such a review is the only way to get out of this. Even if they court-martial me as a scapegoat, I can argue that I was aware of the danger by asking about the condition of the artillery behind me, and was doing all I could to resolve the crisis. I need to prepare my insurance first.

“A flight of airborne security is coming to cover the artillery, ETA 300 seconds. The seventh roving squadron is also coming to assist. As reported earlier, their ETA is 600 seconds.”

Ah, I see that this is the worst-case scenario. Please serve divine retribution to the jerk that caused this to happen!

¹ **Pogue** is pejorative military slang for non-combat, staff, and other rear-echelon or support units. "Pogue" frequently includes those who don't have to undergo the stresses that the infantry does.

Why are the enemy Mages heading for the artillery in the lines behind me instead of anywhere else? What is the frontline unit in charge of early warnings doing?

Why didn't they detect a squadron pushing this deep into our territory? If they let their guard down because victory was assured, and shoved the responsibility onto me, how can I take it? If they want to attack the artillery, isn't it fine to attack the zone next door? I won't mind that at all. But why me?

That damn devil. Is he still cursing me? Great, I say. If this is the case, I'll go all out too. Everyone wants me dead? I won't go down alone. I've made up my mind. I will pull everyone down with me. Instead of dying alone, it's better to make it huge and drag everyone alongside me. I won't be able to bear it otherwise.

“Fairy08, roger. Norden Control, I will make it out alive, witness me!”

“Norden Control, acknowledged. Good luck.”

... I admit my shout was in frustration. Where is this luck you're wishing me? Why the unnecessary words? The disgusting feeling welling up in my chest is making me frown.

My situation right now is like the Tokugawa army on the verge of complete victory in the battle of Sekigahara, when the Shimazu forces came out of nowhere. What I want to say is— “Don't come here! Shoo, go the other way.” Tanya bit her lower lip as she cursed her own misfortune. Forget it, this is my fate after being manipulated by [existence X] and co. I was prepared for this in the end... Although I've already gathered my resolve, I still have to buy some time in the sky where the enemy has the upper hand...

Are there no child protection services here? I might not be cute on the inside, but my outward appearance is that of a kid. Instead of a kid, I am closer to a small child or toddler. Maybe the enemy would be hesitant to attack because of how I look, but it is difficult to expect such humanism on the battlefield.

Including the Holocaust, if you knew what happened in Sarajevo and Rwanda, it was easy to understand that believing blindly in human kindness is very dangerous. People will change into ‘devils’, and commit demonic acts easily. It might not be taught in civics and ethics classes, but that’s the kind of beings humans are.

Speaking of which, thinking that the existence of such devils committing inhuman acts meant a benevolent god must surely exist— such viewpoints from western culture are interesting too. But regrettably, I don’t think [existence X] is benevolent, so I’ll have to refute their views.

[“Is God dead?”]

There might be room for argument, but Nietzsche’s¹ conclusion is correct. There is no God. Humanity has to save itself. In such a situation, that means conducting delaying defences.

What she had on hand was full military garb with light protection against bullets, observation equipment, and a standard Mk. 13 Operation Orb made by Folkerr factory. Her spell rifle that shot magical projectiles beyond the caster’s range of consciousness wasn’t with her, as this was an observation mission. It was also too heavy, and regrettably, this body couldn’t handle it.

Under such circumstances, what can I do in order to hinder the progress of the enemy? I know right from the get-go that I can only hope to target their weak points. And of course, I have no intention of dying needlessly. In the worst case

¹ **Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche** (15 October 1844 – 25 August 1900) was a German philosopher, cultural critic, poet, composer, and Latin and Greek scholar whose work has exerted a profound and lasting influence on Western philosophy and modern intellectual history.

scenario, I will even blow myself up. Instead of being picked off easily, I would rather take them with me. However, I really want to survive this.

Naturally, the main priority should be to live on, so no, it is better to run now. If I abandon the equipment for artillery support, I'll be lightly geared. If the objective of the enemy is the artillery, I just need to focus on fleeing and can definitely pull a large distance away into a safe area. The problem is, I am confident about running away now, but not so sure of what happens next. Desertion before the enemy is punishable by death. The moment you desert in the face of the enemy, you will need to play an intense game of hide and seek with the military police forever. Even though I am alone without any wingman, I have no choice but to fight.

“... That means this is my personal battle?”

Fighting with the resolve to die in a battle where victory was assured. No, strictly speaking, the objective of the enemy wasn't to neutralize me, but to relieve their allies' withdrawal effort by attacking the artillery. To them, killing me was like swatting a fly nearby as an afterthought.

The threat of my elite life and career ending in such a casual way is humiliating. Looking down on others is my right, how can others do that to me? With no regards to the consequences, Tanya repeatedly injected herself with stimulants via doping spells. Her reaction speed and explosive strength was enhanced. She forced her magic power circuits open, and soothed the pain before it started with anesthesia in her brain. Ahhh, it feels good, my body is getting stimulated and becoming burning warm.

This must be what it means to feel high. Even if I get shot down, I won't be tormented by any pain and could run away without a hitch.

“What an honour. So much fun... The greatest enjoyment. Hmmm, I'm so excited that I can't help myself...”

“Fairy08?”

By intentionally letting the command post hear me talking to myself, I'll feel more at ease. There will at least be a witness to prove I am full of fighting spirit. Even though I am feeling so great and happy that the world seems to be spinning, I can still keep a clear mind and think. The brains of Mages are really excellent.

I can keep my mind from being corrupted by drugs and madness. That is why I can't give up being a Mage. As for my job in the army, I want to give that up immediately, of course.

“I was just thinking what a boring job this was, to think I will be facing an army by myself as the spotlight of the battlefield.”

This means that I definitely can't die in a place like this. Even though this world is unfair and depressing, that was because of the market failure. Since there was market failure, it needs to be optimized.

The most crucial part is the assets I actually have, so I need to increase the value of my assets. I will need a marketing strategy then. I need to promote myself as a product. Hold on to any chance to perform, and attack fiercely. That's the gist of it.

Which means if I can utilize the opportunity I was given, my life would be very enjoyable.

“I thought this would be a battle that involved all elements of warfare, to think it would be a stage for me to shine.”

I wasn't happy at all and I was the only one in this airspace. The worst-case situation where I can't even sneak off. I am severely lacking in battle options. Others won't see me no matter how pretentious I act, I just need to consider the

viewpoint of my superior. When humans become desperate, they unexpectedly turn into actors.

“I really am grateful. Well, well... This is a good day to die.”

“Throw away the observation equipment. Right, let’s dance with the enemy Mages wearing heavy armour with ground-attack loadouts—” While Tanya hyped herself up with motivational thoughts, she started air combat maneuvers. In this most dire of situations she didn’t want to face, all she could do was give it her all. Most importantly, she has to survive this while fulfilling her obligations.

“I just need to show that I did my duty. Fight a few rounds, then use my acting skills to make it look like I have been beaten back, or shot down. I will leave the rest to the others. Those bastards who are insisting on coming over to attack our artillery even if it meant pushing themselves will probably not pursue me if I was to run—” Tanya thought in her heart.

The ideal scenario would be to lose my ability to fight even if I “want” to, and make an emergency landing near allied forces. If I successfully hindered the mission of these Federation maggots, that would be wonderful. Anyway, I need to waste their time. For enemies who are breaching our defensive lines, there was nothing more valuable than time. This might just be self-consolation, but I hope to let them learn about karma. This will definitely be a battle without winners...and if there is one, it will be me.

Although I hate hurting myself, I’m willing to do it even if my body will be covered in mud. But I don’t want to die. There is no reason why I have to die. Even if I have to drink muddy water, I must live on. Life itself is a battle, afterall.



“... Colonel Suez! Enemy reinforcements! A squadron is approaching fast! There is also a flight of Mages coming from behind—they are probably the reserves!”

Oh God, why?

“The 16th Holershtan division covering the retreat has been overrun!”

Why is this happening?

“Major LaCampe’s wing has an emergency message for all assault units! They are engaged by a wing of Empire Mages and can’t keep the retreat route open for long.”

Why did my home nation chose this wrongful path?

“I get it! There’s no time—can’t we take out that artillery observer right now!?”

No matter how unyielding Lt. Col. Anson was, his forces were being shredded by artillery fire, and the situation was becoming worse with every second. He could see it as he flew through the sky. Even if Lt. Col. Anson was filled with rage and anxiety, screaming for the enemy's’ indirect fire¹ to stop, the situation was not improving.

“Scored a grazing hit!”

Lt. Col. Anson sighed deeply; if his eyes had lasers, he would have burned the enemy Mage to crisp with his glare. *Ahh, even though these are the northern skies*

¹ **Indirect fire** is aiming and firing a projectile without relying on a direct line of sight between the gun and its target, as in the case of direct fire. Aiming is performed by calculating azimuth and elevation angles, and may include correcting aim by observing the fall of shot and calculating new angles.

I am so familiar with. Everything in the world today, even the sky he knew so well, filled him with rage.

“He’s taken an annoying position. To run above his friendly forces, such a troublesome bloke.”

They were pursuing a single enemy with large numbers. Even though the enemy was willing to do anything to survive, they couldn’t accuse him of being despicable. If Anson was a third party, the relentless chivalry of the enemy would prompt Anson to offer his highest respect...but they didn’t have time to be amazed by the enemy’s skill in battle.

Anson Suez could hear the nonstop shelling and see his fellow countrymen being turned into dust.

“...Those damn politicians!”

It was obvious who was responsible for this. The words he swore rang clear. He really wanted to dump those morons looking down on the Londinum Protocol and ignoring the contents of the treaty down there. Their idiotic actions had landed the entire nation into a crisis.

“Close quarter combat! Prepare to charge!”

“Colonel Suez! Let’s go for the secondary option and attack the artillery directly! The enemy Mage might have excellent mobility, but a flight would be enough to take him out!”

“We can’t, Lagarde, the enemy’s already sent reinforcements. We’ll be wiped out!”

For better or worse, Lt. Col. Suez' unit was in too deep. If they had a bit more combat prowess, they might be able to forcefully attack the enemy battery. However, they had to split his forces to secure the Federation retreat route, so he only had slightly more than a flight in numbers right now.

“Cunningham, how much longer ‘til enemy reinforcements reach here?!”

“The closest unit is 480 seconds away! If we don't hurry, they'll be on our tail!”

While the Empire's forces were on their way to intercept, Anson couldn't see a way out in this gambit with his entire wing on the line. That was why he chose to do what he could with the forces he had on hand.

This was the stoic decision made by the Federation airman Lt. Col. Anson Suez, and was also the best choice he could make from the intelligence available to him. He was a soldier without romantic ideals. That's why he concluded the enemy batteries must be defended heavily and gave up assaulting them directly.

This was the cruel reality for him. There was no cover above the artillery right now.

“Got it. Close quarters... Lagarde! You're too careless!”

“Captain! Captain Lagarde!”

“Cunningham, cover him! Lagarde, can you fly? Lagarde!”

Captain Lagarde who was growing frustrated with the situation charged the enemy Mage with a shout. His allies couldn't react in time, resulting in a lag in their covering fire. The instant they stopped firing because of their fear of hitting Captain Lagarde with friendly fire, the enemy cast a spell. Lagarde, who thought

his allies would cover him with suppressing fire, wanted to change course at the last moment but was too close to his opponent.

“Ugh, damn bastard! Support him, now!”

Not just a shock wave, it was as good as a direct hit. Just changing his course didn't help at all. His shield was downed and his armour breached. However, Lagarde made the snap judgement of covering his face with his arms which saved his life, a blessing from god.

“—Break off! That bastard did that on purpose! Thor?!”

Superiority in numbers. Concentrated fire. But paying the price of allowing the enemy Mage to regain his freedom after their suppression fire was too high.

“Casualty report!”

“Two down, Captain Lagarde is seriously injured.”

Lagarde, whose arms were roasted, was losing altitude as he slipped out of consciousness. Captain Lagarde's wingman, 1st Lieutenant Thor, got into the line of fire in an attempt to protect him, was caught by the blast from close range, and in no shape to fight.

“Tch, he played us like a fiddle. Colonel, I am going in, cover me!”

“Ah, damn it, cover him!”

“Hit! Hit!”

“I’m taking your arms!”

At that moment, he heard this clearly in his ears:

“I caught you.”

This was an elated voice. The laughter of a maniac.

“No, Valt! Fall back, he’s gonna...”

Just as he was about to give a warning, the Imperial Mage cast his own spell the next instant, pulling the charging Lagarde and himself into the magic’s effective range.

“A suicide bomber...”

It wasn’t a scene he wanted to understand, but he still saw it clearly.

“Colonel, that’s the time limit! They’re almost on us!”

“...We have downed the observer! Everyone pull out!”



**Unified Calendar Year 1923 Imperial Capital Belun Imperial Army
Headquarters, Manpower Department Branch, Head Office.**

Massaging his aching head as he smoked from being too focused, Major Lehrgen in charge of the Imperial army manpower affairs, tensed his intelligent face. He had the airs of a noble, but right now, he couldn't help but moan stiffly.

The Headquarters Manpower Merit Investigation Branch: the frontline accomplishments of soldiers were scrutinized here before forwarding adequate applications for rewards or medals. In short, this was the unit responsible for personnel appraisal, the heart of the Imperial manpower department. Officers who were assigned here as part of their job rotation in staff headquarters would be candidates as generals in the future, and honing their skills in identifying talent was a tradition.

His capability was guaranteed. Even after the fierce battle in the north when the Manpower Department was flooded with huge amount of award recommendations, Major Lehrgen, as the Merit Investigation Branch head, still managed to handle these documents in a timely manner. It was proof that his superiors that had assigned him here were right about him.

And just like that, Major Lehrgen suddenly stopped writing, stared at the award application and sighed. This made his subordinates look at him worriedly, as it was only natural for them to wonder, "what happened?"

"... So that girl is in Norden."

Major Lehrgen muttered with tobacco smoke blowing out of his mouth, showing his disgust for this document.

The subject being recommended was Mage 2nd Lieutenant, Tanya Degurechaff. She had ranked 2nd in her graduating class, and was dragged into the Norden incident when she went to the north for her training exercise. She fought hard in the northern army and earned commendations, made great contributions to the her fellow units, and received a combined recommendation application from the local

command. For the Manpower Merit Investigation Branch, such documents were the norm. At most, it was just a bit rare to see her nickname being included.

Of course, in the fair and objective eyes of the Manpower Branch members, they held high regards for 2nd Lieutenant Degurechaff for her self-sacrificial maneuver for the sake of the larger tactical picture. Performing delaying tactics to the extreme, she hindered the enemy's movement greatly. Even though she didn't manage to hold them off until reinforcements arrived, she still managed to shoot one down and heavily damage two. It was a great result, and she prevented the enemy from breaching her line of defence in the end. Although she was literally covered in wounds, she didn't stop providing support to her fellow units. Such praiseworthy, selfless actions was a rare find — even in the vast Empire military.

Normally, Major Lehrgen wouldn't need to hesitate after receiving such a report. At the most, he would add some notes to hasten the process. Unfortunately, Major Lehrgen knew about 2nd Lieutenant Degurechaff when she was just a Phase One cadet¹ in OCS. She even left a good impression on him.

This was one of the few times he visited OCS for his manpower branch duties.

What he saw then was a short, or rather, a cute, small child who was at an age where she should be playing with toys. The surreal scene of her wielding a Operation Orb in place of a toy while kicking and shouting at the cadets who were sitting down. This was the only incident that made Lehrgen doubt his own eyes.

Logically speaking, he just needed to assume the small girl was an excellent Mage who skipped grades. In fact, his first impression of her was that she was the mature Wunderkind who was famous around here.

Despite the conscience in his heart telling him that sending a child less than ten years old into the front line was inhumane, his experience in the army refuted this

¹ **Phase One**, The final school term for OCS, cadets start out from phase four.

point strongly, and he knew that Mages matured early. This was an era where boys and girls in grade school with sorcery talents would be sent to the frontlines if they were to volunteer for enlistment. For the volunteers studying in OCS, there was no need to worry about her assignment. That should be the case normally. That was, if normalcy actually applied.

Thinking back carefully, that was a horrible incident.

A girl less than ten years of age— a young child flying in the battlefield with the expression of a veteran... just this was enough to give him goosebumps. He had no intention of blaming OCS, but he still wanted to question them whether they were grooming Mages, or creating killer dolls.

In most cases, what a cadet would say and what they would do were two different matters. No matter how much they could boast, newly commissioned officers were as useless as expected. They were full of drive, but most would consider it a blessing if they didn't hold the veterans back. However Tanya was a special case of saying what she exactly meant to do. Since her days as a cadet, she had displayed shocking pragmatism.

When Lehrgen asked the instructors how she was doing in school, they told him that when she was explaining the guidelines as a Phase One cadet to Phase Two cadets, she declared that she would purge the incompetent from the military. For the spirited Phase One cadets, such shouts were nothing surprising; even the instructors laughed when they heard that, thinking she was really driven. However, her actions matched her words so closely it made the instructors turn green.

During a certain field maneuver exercise, a Phase Two cadet who caused some minute disturbance not only ignored Phase One cadet Tanya Degurechaff's orders, he even mocked her age and appearance. His actions were nothing short of foolish. At this moment, Major Lehrgen witnessed her will to carry out her duty as a commander, as she prepared to execute the offender according to military law.

For Major Lehrgen, this was the incident that made him remember the dangerous existence of Tanya Degurechaff, out of all the Mage officers in the Empire.

It was true that the cadet who disobeyed orders needed to be disciplined harshly. Discipline and training were the foundation of the Empire; these principles on which the army was built on would collapse if there was any lapses. Since this was a fundamental problem, the resolute attitude of the commander was correct.

Truthfully speaking and considering historical facts, an officer's pistol was a tool to execute deserters and soldiers falling out of line. The obligation of the officers in commanding their subordinates was that important; there was no need to explain further.

However—shouting “*Since this blockhead forgets my orders, I will have to split his skull open and jam them directly into his brain!*” and then proceeding to tie the cadet up while deploying her magic knife — that was too much. When the instructors intervened, she was seriously about to slash him, Lehrgen saw this with his own eyes. If no one had stopped her, she definitely would have slashed him.



She would be an excellent officer in the front lines. However, she lacked the sense of a normal person. As a human, she lacked something important... This might be an ideal quality for soldiers fighting in the battlefield. There were few whose personality suited war so well. Including the Empire, all armies could only mold their combat personnel through discipline and training to ensure they have the right mentality.

Looking at it this way, she was a great talent. As his job was human resources, Major Lehrgen might have hated it, but he could understand it very well. To initiate suicide bombing tactics and carry out missions faithfully was the ideal soldier for the army. And of course, there were some parts that was obviously detrimental.

Especially her pursuit of unfailing combat readiness; she was completely off track from the spirit of the ideology. If she was given the freedom to act autonomously, her overly dangerous thought process might be a hidden problem. She was a true battle fanatic.

“...This is not a joke.”

For this incident, because Lehrgen knew he was in the minority, he sincerely hoped his superior would reconsider this commendation.

She insisted on fighting until reinforcement arrives, fought fearlessly, and in the end, she barely survived after being picked up by allied infantry that were searching the vicinity. Of course she deserved praise, but considering the nature of that person, this was to be expected. Even the way she fought was brilliant, and comparing her techniques to that of textbooks were not a stretch. Her four limbs had gun wounds over a wide area—even her Operation Orb had marks of being bitten by her teeth? Simply put, she had guarded her vitals carefully and resisted as much as she could, while making calm tactical judgements to buy more time.

And that was the reason why Major Lehrgen could only hug his head in angst after reading the report.

It was true that she was dangerous. However, from the viewpoint of fair punishment and reward, such outstanding accomplishment could not be downplayed. It was probably not allowed to be downplayed.

It wasn't clear what developments the future would hold, but from the merits of her recommendations, she would probably be honored with the Silver Wings Assault medal. The northern army would probably conclude her actions to be the most commendable in this first battle. Relatively speaking, it was the biggest crisis during the whole operation. On top of that, the merit was earned by a Mage from OCS, the perfect exhibition for the armed forces wanting to motivate the fighting spirit of the troops. It was an achievement in a real battle after all, a perfect story for propaganda. Bestowing her with the beautiful name of, "mithril," an honourable nickname for a Mage so soon, was due of the hyped-up atmosphere within the military. Lehrgen noticed this right away.

To raise troop morale, they have to give due rewards for her efforts, even if she wasn't a hero. However as a staff officer, the soldier Lehrgen that took pride in fairness and loyalty, for the first time his obligations and emotions ran contrary to each other.

This completely weaponized child would only induce fear in others. He had to do something to ensure she only focused her attention on the enemy. *I will make you a hero and respect your battle merits. I will do my best to grant you autonomy. I will try to give you all support available, and the preparations for you to fight. I will do all that, so please, obediently fight at the front lines. Is it alright to give a soldier I can only control with pleas such fame and influence?*

"... At least, if I can push it one grade lower..."

A soldier with the Silver Wings Assault medal had a lot of influence and say in the military. It was enough for Major Lehrgen to grumble unconsciously.

Amongst the many medals of the Empire, the Silver Wings Assault medal was the most valuable of them all. There were many medals in the Empire that honour exemplary personal merits, but for the convenience of reputation and ceremony, there were also medals awarded for a certain number of years of service and efforts. But realistically speaking, those who contributed significantly to the nation and was given medals for valour and duty were deemed more valuable. (This part was probably a reflection of the Empire's plain and resolute culture, but it might also encompass nationalism in some sense.)

In the past, people formed laurels into a crown to honour the personal valour of individuals. However, with the modernization of the army, all commendations has been replaced by the presentation of medals. Infantry Assault medals were bestowed onto soldiers who engaged the enemy courageously and fearlessly, honouring their display of valor on the battlefield. The vanguard units on a large scale offensive would normally receive Infantry Assault medals, with soldiers who earned battle merits receiving Infantry Assault medals with Oak Leaves

The ones awarded with Oak Leaves would become a core member of their unit and be trusted unconditionally. However, even the bearer of Infantry Assault medals with Oak Leaves couldn't match those with Silver Wings Assault medals. Only for those who save allied forces from a crisis, an honour reserved for these archangel-like saviours. Even the requirement for the award was different from normal Assault medals

The Silver Wings Assault medal was not recommended by the commanding officers. Normally, it was the commanding officer of the unit that was saved who submitted the recommendation because of their overflowing respect for their comrade-in-arms. (This mostly referred to the most senior commander of the aided units.)

Beyond these requirements, the aspect most medal bearers had in common was that they were dead. That was how high the bar was set, only those who brave such dangers and fought heroically were awarded with this medal.

Can one man save a unit against such impossible odds? How extreme were their means? Was it possible to do so by normal methods? Without needing to answer, one would understand just by browsing the memorial photos of the Silver Wings Assault medal awardees. In them, most of the medals were placed on the cap hanging on the awardees' rifle. It was stated officially that only Silver Wings Assault medal awardees may use their rifle and caps to receive the medal on their behalf, which was telling of the condition of most recipients.

Hence, regardless of the recipient's rank, they were worthy of a salute from all officers and men in the Empire; that's how honourable the medal was.

Admit it. Frankly speaking, when he thought about what that person would do if given the authority and power, Lehrgen couldn't help feeling afraid.

That was how abnormal she was. He thought at first the overzealous Fatherland Recruitment Department had rather suspiciously found an exceedingly capable gem of a soldier. . He even suspected she underwent an extreme patriotic education, so Lehrgen asked a friend in the Intel Department to investigate her background in the orphanage. However, she turned out to be clean. Her origin was an average orphanage run by employees who could still be considered kind-hearted, one that could be found anywhere. The only thing of note was that they received adequate donations, so the nutrition of the orphans was at the normal level.

This meant 2nd Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff's fanaticism for the military and thirst for battle had nothing to do with being starved or being abused violently. Out of curiosity, Lehrgen dug up her school entry assessment records, and she...that monster wearing the skin of a young child... answered like this:

“I don’t have any other choice.”

Filled with patriotism and the will to contribute to the nation, a soldier so ideal and talented, with the determination to train herself without rest. These were all commendable attributes. Just one of this attributes would be enough to make Lehrgen, the soldier in charge of the Empire’s Human Resources happy.

If someone displays these qualities, we would be overjoyed. We would think that these are the talents the army needed. And right now, the person who was a manifestation of all these qualities was right before him. The ironic thing was that Major Lehrgen realized the fact that the ideal talent the Empire was looking for would be a pure monster, which made him afraid.

He wasn’t sure what she meant by, “no other choice.” If he needed to come up with a logical hypothesis, maybe she thought joining the military was the only way her urge to kill could be justified by society? Who could say for sure that her nature wasn’t that of a psychopath, and the only career that fit with her hobby was enlisting in the army?

Who could guarantee that she wasn’t a dangerous person who would go on a killing spree when she saw dripping fresh blood? Her every move might be that of an ideal soldier, but looking at the full picture, she was either insane or psychotic.

Of course, Lehrgen understood she was someone who would start a war without batting an eye. Those who could instigate a war were either a true lunatic or someone whose mind had legitimately snapped. Going by his experience, Lehrgen could understand incidents to such a degree. However, if this girl was enjoying the war, what should he make of it?

He once heard that for killers, imagination and reality were just a type of aesthetics for them. This meant mass murderers couldn’t differentiate between their imagination and actions. Back then, he laughed it off, thinking this was a weird view, but he finally understood. No matter how unwilling he was, he still

understood. No matter how nicely he put it, she was still an abnormality, an existence that was different from “us.”

She was probably what was known as a hero. In other words, she was different from normal people in some ways. It wasn't wrong to honour heroes, but he wouldn't ask students to follow in the footsteps of heroes. He couldn't teach them that. OCS was a place to nurture talents, not a place to create madmen.

On the same day, Empire Headquarters War Room

Headquarters had decided to award a medal to a certain Mage officer. It was a rare occasion to award the Silver Wing Assault medal to someone that wasn't a corpse, and a nickname would also be bestowed with exceptional speed in this grand ceremony. However, in a corner of Central Headquarters, undisturbed by the rowdy awards ceremony formations, a place guarded tightly by security and entry was granted to authorized personnel only, Headquarters' first (strategic) war room, an intense and heated discussion was ongoing.

To be precise, it was the strong objections of two brigadier generals.

“I absolutely oppose this! The merits of committing our forces this way is not worth the risk of losing our capability to react to new threats quickly!”

The soldier in his prime years stood up and expressed his vehement objection with a shout. His pale blue eyes were filled with confidence, a gaze that would never back down. Those who saw them would understand those were eyes that always focused on reality. A capable man wrought from confidence and talent, Brigadier General Rudelsdorf was held in such high regards by Headquarters, put his talent and honour behind as he leaned over the conference table and shouted.

“We only need to dispatch the units already on site to pursue them! By preserving our strategic flexibility, and to pressure them step by step, that's all!”

What he meant to say was that their strategic flexibility shouldn't be compromised.

“I have to express my dissent as well. We have already destroyed the invading forces and have no need of doing anything else through war. Our national defence objectives have already been met.”

Siding with maintaining strategic flexibility, Brigadier General Zettois with a mature demeanour and scholarly appearance calmly joined the dissenting ranks, speaking like a mathematician reporting his findings.

“The points of the Brigadiers are valid... Lieutenant General Louis, may I have your opinion?”

The Emperor's Aide-de-camp¹, Marchese, who was chairing the meeting felt that the opinions of the two Brigadiers were logical and irrefutable. However, the cunning Chief of Staff already had a way of ignoring those with opposing views.

That doesn't mean Marchese wasn't worried at all. Considering the fact that the recommendation of Headquarters would be influential to the decision of the Commander-in-chief, it was necessary to dig deeper. Hence, by letting the other side express their views, he wanted to push Chief of Staff Louis, who was the main champion of the view to launch an offensive campaign, to state his stance.

“Being cautious is good, but the neighbouring countries are showing no signs of mobilizing their forces. Under such circumstances, we'll be able to launch a major

¹ In Japan, the **aide-de-camp to the Emperor** (侍従武官 *jijū bukan*²) is a special military official whose primary duties are to report military affairs to the Emperor and act as a close attendant (chamberlain). From 1896 through to 1945, a small number of army and naval aides-de-camp were supplied to the Emperor due to his increased status and the risks to him during wartime.

offensive without being restrained by other factors— wouldn't this be a great opportunity?"

The Chief of Staff stood up and answered with a troubled face. He had high expectations for these two subordinates, and their betrayal caused him to make a confused expression. There was also anger in his face, allowing others to see his turbulent emotions.

"General, sir! At the very least, please limit the mobilized units! If we deploy our entire force, Plan 315 will fall apart!"

Brigadier General Rudelsdorf raised a simple objection based on the geopolitical situation of the Empire. The Empire was one of the Great Powers, and as well, the only nation surrounded by many other great powers. Due to that, its national defence strategy had to consider the dire possibilities of fighting wars on multiple fronts. The inherent fear that they could only rely on quality to fend off their enemies on two fronts, and their geographical location necessitates a strong army. Such was the historical background behind their rise as a military powerhouse

"I don't intend to borrow Brigadier Rudelsdorf's words; I personally think that we shouldn't compromise our national defence policy of Plan 315."

Being surrounded by potential enemies on all sides, the only strategy the Empire could adopt was a defensive strategy focusing on the efficient deployment of their entire armed forces. It was a delicate defence policy which committed troops superior in quality and quantity to neutralize one of the invading armies before engaging the other invaders. The national defence policy of the Empire was "Plan 315." Its goal was to forcefully maintain a war on two fronts—even the timetable of rail stations were carefully planned—a piece of art that was the prize of the Empire. Simply put, it would require a lot of time to rebuild the system if it was to crumble.

“Zettois, committing forces in waves is a military taboo. I don’t think you need me to remind you.”

“Sir, I also understand the foolishness in sending troops piece by piece. However, with the invading army destroyed, I question the necessity of pushing our main force out.”

On the other hand, what Chief of Staff Louis had said makes sense. With the Ildoa Kingdom, the Francois Republic, and the Lewshille Federation showing no signs of amassing their armies, the stage for the complete annihilation of the Federation had been set. If they were going to do so, they had to go all out.

However, on the topic of invading the enemy nation, Brigadier General Zettois’s rationale that the army had already scored a grand victory and need not do more clashed with the opinion of Chief of Staff Louis.

“I agree with Brigadier Zettois. Our army is victorious, the focus right now should be how we should capitalize on this! Mobilizing our forces without clear directions would make our strategic objectives too ambiguous. I can’t imagine how this would benefit our nation.”

He didn’t touch on the necessity of accomplishing more; his doubt was based simply on how to maximize this victory after understanding the overview of the war. Brigadier Rudelsdorf’s words might have had a different focus, but it echoed the worries of making moves that would shake the foundation of the national defence policy without any contingency plans.

“Rudelsdorf, since the Commander-in-Chief has yet to set his policies, the only thing Headquarters could do was to score a larger victory.”

“General, sir, actions without clear strategic goals are unthinkable. Large scale campaigns that are not carefully planned could possibly harm our national defence strategy. Allow me to state my strong objection.”

Zettois expressed his agreement with a bitter face.

“How could we let such a great opportunity slip away!? Our army has resolved the Norden territory dispute in this battle! We can even solve the Empire’s geopolitical troubles!”

There were good reasons for some of the attendees to shout. They all bore hope for a wonderful future, thinking this was a good chance for the Empire to settle the very real problem that the Empire might be attacked by her enemy from all sides at any time. If they could vanquish the Federation, that would be one less potential threat to the Empire. An opportunity for the Empire to resolve its geopolitical issues that plagued it over these long years.

“Objection! This is not something that must be done at the cost of disrupting our defence plans!”

The core of the problem was just like the point Brigadier Rudelsdorf made: whether the army should secure a safe future at the cost of unsettling their current defensive strategy.

“The objective of the Empire is national security. Since the borders had already been decided through the Londinum Protocol, this is practically an non-issue.”

But even Brigadier General Zettois made a brave remark that was as good as saying, “Threats at the level of the Federation could just be ignored.” In other words, he didn’t want to waste time on the issue of the Londinum Protocol.

“We need not enter the enemy’s stage! We just need to fight in our own! Are we going to risk all the preparations we’ve done because of this?!”

The most important point was just what Brigadier General Rudelsdorf had been voicing passionately to the group. This was an issue that concerned the very foundation of the Empire’s national defence.

“Plan 315,” which had been refined by Headquarters all these years, the only national defence strategy the Empire could adopt because of its geopolitical position. Even though the Empire was constantly attacked by other nations, they could counterattack smoothly with their defensive strategy, forced unto them because they were surrounded by potential enemies. The fact was, the Empire couldn’t think of any other plan that was more reliable.

“And you want us to let go of this great opportunity to break the situation of being surrounded by enemies?”

“If we could weaken the Federation’s forces, we would be able to focus more on the east. Even for the west, we would have an easier time building a defence line against Albion-Francois.”

However, there were still people expressing their opposition. For their fatherland stuck in a tight spot, this was a good chance to be liberated from the chains binding them. The majority of the staff showed their determination that couldn’t be stopped—if they acted now, they could solve the military conundrum that had been troubling the Empire since its foundation.

“It’s fortunate that the great nations are showing no signs of mobilizing their forces. I believe if we act now, we can cut off the roots of the problem once and for all.”

They didn’t realize this judgement was a mistake. At least for now.

[chapter]

II

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Elinium Type 95 Operation Orb



CHAPTER 2

Elinium Type 95 Operation Orb

The Airspace Above Klusross Army Air Force Testing Factory

Southwest side of Imperial Capital Berlun, above Klusross Army Air Force Testing Facility; today was noisy as usual.

Through scientific research, it became possible to recreate [Techniques], which enabled miracles by way of Orbs and Scepters. Modern magical studies and research made it possible to interfere with reality through the Operation Orb. In this physical world that was dominated by the third dimension, this was a method that allowed apparition of phenomena by giving appropriate stimulation to the point of application. To put it in simple terms, it was the difference between turning the gear wheel of a lighter with your hand and turning it with the power of magic. As long as you understood the way of doing it, you could recreate deeds such as miracles. This has already become a type of skill that could be achieved through technology.

Of course, fundamental principle related to mana and interference spells were not completely understood as of now. However, in order to gain military advantage over others, magic engineering research was pushed forcefully and the Empire made a significant breakthrough, leading to a formation of a new type of military unit. That breakthrough was the successful development of the Operation Orb, a combination of both mana and analog calculation. Unlike the era of legends, this allowed people to clearly understand in detail the where, the how, and to what degree of power to interfere with reality..

The essence of the Operation Orb was undoubtedly in the practical use of aeronautic magic. It allowed mages who were mere mortals to soar through the air. Which meant creating propulsion, forcefully raising a person into the sky, and maintaining balance while in the air. If they wished to, a magician could even straddle on a broom and pretend to be a witch. As the energy source that produces

the stimulation, the bayonet-mounting rifle was a valuable item that served as a substitute for a scepter. Of course, it was a weapon mainly used to cast long range magic in a battle.

In any case, miracles were phenomena that could be recreated by using technology. Its utility and military application was widely recognized.

Yet, because people knew the importance of the orbs, the Great Powers had developed a cutthroat competition in researching this technology.

Even the pioneer of this aspect, the Empire, was not an exception.



Today, the weather was sunny with strong winds. My current altitude was 4000 feet high and increasing. About half of the scheduled experiments had been completed. Compared to the previous experiment where I almost died when the parachute failed to deploy due to humidity from the clouds, the conditions for today were not too bad. However, I didn't feel motivated at all. It was not that simple of an experiment; if you were to lose focus for even a moment, the calculations would collapse and the orb receiver would burst into flames. Such conditions made it impossible to relax.

I stiffened my face that was on the verge of spasming as I cautiously maintained cruising speed relative to ground speed as stated in the plan. Since I already successfully completed the other experiments, all that was left was to ascend.

That's right, with plenty of defects, zero reliability, the fancily-named [New Model] prototype orb.

Should I think of this as the joy of having the world in the palm of my hand? Interfering with the laws of nature is a job that requires delicate control and attention to fine details.

Tanya's hand was tattered after being ordered to perform this task which required complete concentration with no margin of error to speak of.

If current medical technology was not this advanced, she would only have her left arm right now.

Holding an unreliable Orb was akin to holding a grenade. The result was obvious without saying. That was why the Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff's mood was heavy as she flew, sighing in her heart.

[Receiver explosion! It's on fire! Terminate experiment! Terminate experiment!]

Along with the moans from Tanya, screams from the air controller echoed through the sky once again.

How did things turn out this way? To explain, we would need to go back to my reassignment to the rear to recuperate after suffering my injuries in the north.

For the recuperating Mage Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaf, her assignment after she returned to duty was a matter of life and death. After the arduous battle, not only did she achieve great results, she even got a medal to show for it... This would be advantageous for her future prospects; however it also presented the problem that she might get tied down on the frontlines.

[Please let me read it.]

That's why after I took the letter offered to me. I was hoping that it wasn't an order to redeploy to the frontlines. However my worries turned out to be for nought—It was an undated domestic deployment order. In other words, it wasn't official now, but once it was dated and signed by my supervisor, it would become an official document immediately. This was known in the military as “pre-decision.”

[Rejoice. This is a notice for your transfer to the Tactical Training Department, and a request for your secondment as testing personnel by the Inspector General's Office.]

All in all, this wasn't a bad situation. Not only was it a domestic posting, it was an administrative role. Working in the training department and partaking in an administrative role as testing personnel, Tanya felt that she was being highly evaluated.

Most important of all, there were many advantages of being assigned to the Tactical Training Department. As an elite unit within the Empire, not only did they get the best equipment, it was also a sacred training ground, suitable for honing skills and researching tactics. It was the best environment to increase one's survivability as much as possible. For Tanya, even though she needed to provide guidance to others, she could also steal the techniques from them. In that case, this was the best assignment. There wouldn't be any negative implications with having the Tactical Training Department on her resume.

As well, the vague request for her secondment to the Inspector General's Office as testing personnel couldn't be too bad. The Inspector General's Office was the classic example of a backend support unit. If she took up a post as testing personnel there, she would be able to hide in the rear lines with the official excuse of performing experiments.

To be frank, I was hoping for an administrative post in the railroad department or Military Headquarters, but this was within acceptable range.

[We wish to respect your opinion as much as possible. Do you have any objections?]

He said he will respect my opinion as per protocol, but it had already been decided. He probably didn't imagine that I would ever reject this offer. Since it had been arranged to such an extent, it also meant I won't be allowed to reject this deployment. There were only three options: Yes, Oui or Ja.

[Yes, I have no objections. I am willing to accept this posting.]

[Very good. So, why don't you start testing out the new prototype once you reach the logistics department. Formally speaking, you are being seconded from the training department.]

After the commander finished, he noted my consent on the official document. This document would then be handed to me as an official assignment letter. From that moment, my transfer was completed administratively. The process was fast—even the internal notification was probably just a formality.

[Of course, I'm sure you have some questions in mind. You have permission to ask them.]

I love superiors who were reasonable. They were worthy of respect.

[Thank you. First, why was I assigned to the training branch?]

Why not post me directly to the Inspector General's Office—I was curious about the rationale? Of course, I welcomed the assignment to the training department, but to think they gave me two wonderful postings. Be it the political workings behind it or the reasons leading to this manpower deployment, please let me understand it better.

I didn't want to be caught up in troublesome matters unknowingly and de-rail my career.

However Tanya's worries were answered surprisingly simply.

[Even if you are an Ace, you are still a child. As such, sending you to the frontline does not leave a good impression for the public.]

....This made me understand that the logic of the higher ups was different from others; they only realized such a thing now.

On paper, I am still a child. It also means that I am in the position where I require the care of another. Looks like these big-shots finally understood what the common sense of society was.

[So you want the Ace to become a rearline accessory?]

Of course, I couldn't let my supervisor see how happy I was that they pulled me from the frontlines over such trivial matters, but I still had to confirm it. If things went smoothly, this would be the best situation in my strategy for survival. This was amazing, wonderful. If it was this moment, I feel that I could achieve mutual understanding with the entire world's population.

Tanya, who was so happy that she could accept any strange ideas at this moment easily, hid her glee under a cold expression.

[Such a novel perspective, Second Lieutenant. I hadn't thought of it that way.]

These words from her commander allowed Tanya to confirm her suspicions.

Even though the higher-ups' intentions were unclear, the commanding officer in front of her did not deny her speculation. This meant that her speculation was not beyond how the situation actually was. How great, safe backline duty.

[I have misspoken.]

[The higher-ups think highly of you. That is also the reason why they've placed you as the key personnel in charge of the development of the new prototype.]

Also, practically speaking, posting an excellent Mage who has returned from the front to instructional duties or technology development was still within the norm of Human Resources. This was typically the best reason to pull young soldiers from the frontline. For members of the military, this was an easily accepted explanation.

After feeling relieved, Tanya started wondering—What is this new prototype from the Inspector General’s Office? She probably wouldn’t be used as a guinea pig, but she was still wanted to know which technological field she would be testing in.

[May I ask about the new prototype?]

If the reply was that it was confidential, then all I could do was to shut up. However, it would be good to have at least some kind of mental preparation.

When getting hit, humans would feel completely different levels of pain, depending on whether they expected it or not. Therefore, Tanya hoped to be notified earlier, so that she would be able to make some proper mental preparations.

Of course, curiosity was a large factor too.

[Well, I only know that you will be testing a prototype Operation Orb.]

[Understood. Thank you for the heads up.]

That was the truth. Within the safety of the rear and with the intent of the developing technology, various tests on the prototype Operation Orb were conducted. What he said was entirely true. Just that he did not inform her that the orb was as unreliable as the Italian Red Devils¹.

That was why I was suffering now.

¹ The Italian ‘**Red Devils**’ Hand Grenade is an Italian Model 35 Hand Grenade. Famous for its rate of accidental explosions and duds, it is feared by both friends and foes.



In the airspace southwest of the Imperial capital Berlun, at a height of 12,000 feet. This already exceeded the maximum elevation of the Operation Orb. This was about 3600 meters high. It is an unreachable height unless one wore special equipment designed specifically for breaking height records and was using a highly enhanced orb. The oxygen density was a concern, and more importantly, there was a high risk of hypothermia.

In order to let my body adapt to high altitudes, I spent too much time at the altitude of 6,800 feet, which proved to be counterproductive. In the end, humans were not meant to stay in high altitudes for such long periods of time.

[Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff? Are you still conscious? Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff?]

With an oxygen density so low it made one's head dull and body as heavy as lead, Tanya felt so tired she didn't even want to answer the radio. Even though she was wearing cold weather clothes, this was an altitude she only managed to reach by carrying an oxygen tank, radio set and parachute.

There was only one thing in Tanya's mind: "the people who sent live humans to this height should try it out themselves."

[Barely. Unable to sustain much longer. To be frank, I don't think anyone can survive above this height.]

This height was colder than the ground temperature by 21.6 degrees. The oxygen level was less than 63% of sea level. Tanya doubted anyone could make a brief stopover at this altitude during aerial combat, and the place itself was obviously rejecting the presence of humans. In the end, the altitude limit of orbs were only six thousand feet. It would be impossible to shake off the effects of gravity any further as it was difficult to generate more propulsion at this height.

That's why Tanya gauged that a mage was roughly equivalent to an attack helicopter in terms of aerial maneuver capability. In fact, due to the difference in flying altitude, the Empire had never incorporated mages and fighter jets into the same fighting unit. That was how absolute the flying altitude was.

Of course, if the only concern was altitude, it could be overcome by using special orbs used to challenge altitude records. However, the orb Tanya was testing wasn't built to break altitude records, but bore the name of "New Model", with the goal of military-wide implementation.

Even so, this "New Type — Elinium Type 95 Operation Orb" was able to exert a propulsion force that was normally impossible. However, the method used was simple and cliché. The concept was the same as an engine, the simplistic idea that, "if one isn't strong enough, use two. If two is still too weak, use four".

Hence, aside from the logo of the research lab to mark it as a prototype, it looked the same as any normal Orb. Design wise, there were also plenty of mechanical parts built into the sphere, and it was the same size as a common Orb.

But the main difference was inside of the Orb

[The main problem is that the mana consumption rate is too heavy. Mana conversion efficiency is really terrible.]

By quadrupling the output of an Operation Orb that uses mana in place of fuel, the mana consumption rate will also increase four-fold. However, unlike oil tanks, humans couldn't easily increase their storage capacity to counter the spike in consumption.

Even though it had revolutionary performance, from the perspective of a mage, the practicality of this unusual Orb that kept posing impossible problems and induced incredible fatigue was doubtful. Not only was its consumption rate four times

higher than usual, there was also the technical problem which required one to synchronize all four Operation Orb cores together.

Due to the success in miniaturizing the design, the size of the Orb was not too different from usual. Even though it had four cores, it was still small enough to be kept inside the breast pocket of a mage, which was amazing. It was convenient to carry and use.

Their astonishing accomplishment of miniaturizing the Orb made their technical skill worthy of respect, but from the standpoint of the user, it was a frustrating piece of junk. Miniaturizing delicate machinery meant lowering its tolerance for error. Not only did the user need to perform the difficult task of synchronizing four cores, the miniaturized Orb core was also unstable and unreliable.

Therefore, although the consumption rate was four-fold in theory, it was much larger than that in reality. Including the mana that constantly leaked out, an optimistic estimate would put consumption at six times the norm. The inability to adapt to the altitude was probably a huge factor; just conducting altitude experiments was as tiring as performing aerial combat maneuvers at full speed. Furthermore, this feeling of fatigue and pain increased exponentially with time.

[Second Lieutenant, can you increase altitude? In theory, you should be able to reach 18,000 feet.]

The testing staff replied with displeasure after receiving Tanya's reply that was filled with fatigue.

...*This maniac*—Tanya cursed in her heart, while staring at the supervising aircraft. The criminal who interjected into the radio communication was in there. How satisfying would it be if Tanya could shoot down the supervising aircraft along with that fellow. Suppressing the tempting urge that surfaced like a drug addiction, Tanya sighed.

That voice was Chief Engineer Adelaide von Schugel, who was also an absolute maniac. Shooting his plane down would only lead to bigger problems and wouldn't

solve the issue, so she could only endure... This was extremely painful for Tanya. *Having to test the prototype developed by that engineer, life is so unreasonable—* Tanya could only lament to herself.

[Professor Schugel, please don't ask the impossible.]

Without an electrically heated suit, living humans would not be able to fly higher than this. In the end, speaking from combat experience, just the fact that I would need to fly with my oxygen tank meant it couldn't be put to practical use. Needless to say, a single hit to the oxygen tank would be a joyous experience for everyone except for the one who got shot.

Let's say if someone didn't wear an electrically heated suit, and relied solely on oxygen produced by magic instead of an oxygen tank to stay in this place. If the mana supply was dependent on the Orb, it would increase the already heavy consumption rate. Compared to normal Orbs, it was a consumption rate that made combat sustainability doubtful. The risk of the user losing consciousness due to factors such as low oxygen was very high.

Parachutes would need to be issued (which wasn't much of an issue for experimental flights in domestic grounds) but to attempt a landing using parachutes while incapacitated and disorientated in a combat scenario would just result in one becoming an easy target. Even after landing, the safety of the user would be dubious, and if you landed behind enemy lines, you would definitely be captured.

The risk of the parachute being burned or malfunctioning due to humidity was significant. Just preparing a reliable parachute would require a lot of effort.

[You should have enough mana left, and the load on the Operation Orb is still within acceptable range.]

However—for oddball researchers who only care about their own project, the “theoretical” limits were everything.

[Professor, the error tolerance of this Orb is too low! This damn flawed thing might catch fire any moment!]

For soldiers who had experienced deadly aerial combat, rather than “theoretical limits,” “reliability” was everything. From Tanya’s perspective, just thinking about the previous altitude experiment resurfaced traumatic memories for her.



It was a tragedy back then. At the altitude of four thousand feet, a slight error in synchronization led to a breakdown in mana balance. The cause was said to be the slight error in mana propagation speed inside the bypass circuit—even the experimental bypass circuit crafted with a higher level of precision than normal circuits used in battle couldn’t handle the load? When I found out the reason, I really felt like shouting: [Just how precise did you expect my control to be?!]

The Operation Orb couldn’t keep the mana from going out of control, resulting in chain explosions as the Orb failed to bear the overload. It was extremely fortunate that I managed to suppress the mana explosion in the nick of time with a backup Operation Orb that was prepared for emergencies.

However, that could only be done if the altitude was about four thousand feet. At twelve thousand feet, it would be impossible to move due to the cold and the severe lack of oxygen made me doubt my ability to maintain consciousness. If the prototype Orb caught fire at such an altitude, I would end up kissing the ground after losing control.

No matter who, even those without the dedication rivaling that of a woman towards her first kiss, no one would want that to happen. It was only natural instinct to throw the Orb away before it went out of control. But as a soldier, I couldn’t do so.

If it was possible I would toss it right away, but the prototype Operation Orb was highly classified. That’s why it wouldn’t be permitted. The moment I threw it

away, protective measures to safeguard the integrity of classified material would be thrown into action.

After all, it was the duty of the testing personnel to return the Orb in good shape as much as possible. That's why I had to be careful with my actions and keep the chance of accidents happening as low as possible. It was difficult to describe, but if forced to use an analogy, this was like riding a unicycle on a tightrope, jumping through hoops of fire and throwing daggers at the same time. The Orb left absolutely no room for error.

Anyone who use such an absurd Orb to increase altitude were either fools or had suicidal tendencies. Or maybe both.



[Of all the things you can say of my masterpiece, you just have to call it a flawed Orb!.]

The direct opinion of the test personnel Tanya was taken badly by the director of research who was pursuing the “theoretical limit.” Of course, Tanya could give the professor heartfelt compliments too; the performance of the Orb was truly exceptional.

To forcefully realize the quad-core synchronization system that was just a theory for current technology, it was an astonishing technical feat. This allowed the miniaturization of the old cores while maintaining their performance. From a purely technological standpoint, he was undoubtedly a genius.

It wasn't an exaggeration to call this the greatest leap in technology since the unraveling of the theory behind the Orb and Scepter system.

Hence, could you please consider the users when creating it? For Tanya, no matter how great the performance was, no one would be able to keep up with the professor's product. There was a saying in the military about “changing your body

to fit the uniform” that would only be possible if the size of the uniform was not too many sizes off.

[Don’t just look at the specifications, consider practical usage too! At least, think more about the engineering redundancy¹!]

In the harsh battlefield, this was the biggest prerequisite in military equipment. The Dienstpferd that the cavalry wanted were not purebred horses.

<Dienstpferd: war horse>

[You are the one talking nonsense! Are you trying to desynchronize the perfectly optimized Orb!?)

[Professor Schugel, I’m begging you, please don’t yell over the comms.]

[Shut up! I will consider that if you take back your words!]

Yelling curses through the radio waves in experimental airspace. Ah, he wasn’t even a professional idiot, but just mentally a brat. Tanya wanted to hold her head and scream. Her head was really hurting badly, but this fellow was also the director of this experiment. If she was in charge of human resources, she wouldn’t neglect her duty and appoint someone who could restrain this technological idiot as his director to rein him in.

But the fact remained that this fellow was the director while I was the main testing personnel. I had nothing against the Empire’s policy of meritocracy, but at least consider the management ability of your officers. I really wanted to yell: “Know the difference between a professional and management!”

¹ In engineering, **redundancy** is the duplication of critical components or functions of a system with the intention of increasing reliability of the system, usually in the form of a backup or fail-safe, or to improve actual system performance, such as in the case of GNSS receivers, or multi-threaded computer processing.

[Like I said...]

Based on my past experience, I was quite dissatisfied with the Empire's management system. On the other hand, as a soldier, I had no choice since the actions I could take were limited by the conditions given to me. However, the consequences of my concentration lapsing cut short this headache-inducing argument.

[The temperature of the receiver and the Orb's core is spiking!]

Eh! Ahhhhhh, damn it—! The accident caused by a lapse of concentration made me groan. The result of a synchronization failure made me unable to handle the Orb's core about to go out of control. I immediately cut off my mana and emergency discharged the remaining mana inside the orb. As an emergency procedure, one move would immediately execute both of these actions.

Fortunately, the safety mechanism that was installed after the previous incident worked much better than expected. Even the receiver that caught fire and exploded the previous time managed to stabilize the circuit somehow. But even so, there was no way to discharge the mana contained within the Operation Orb without damaging it.

The mana within the core components of the Orb was unable to maintain synchronization and began to collide, causing the circuits to fail against the pressures and explode instantly. But what luck!—All thanks to the reinforced casing I vehemently requested being made just in time for this experiment, the explosion caused barely any actual damage.

[Air control officer, please acknowledge the situation. I am going to deploy my parachute now.]

Hence, Tanya's pretty face showed relief as she informed the air control officer with an impatient tone over the wireless comms and got ready to land as per

standard procedure. She had the minimum altitude clearance and was in the Empire's safe zone. Under these conditions, rather than activating the backup Operation Orb in panic, it would be safer to deploy her parachute.

If it was in the Empire, there would be no worry about being sniped while one was slowly descending by parachute. So for the currently-descending Tanya, the most important thing would be to prepare for her safe landing.

[Copy that... Wait... Professor, please stop! Let go! Please let go...]

While she was opening her parachute in the midst of a slow descent, Tanya couldn't help sighing when she heard this awkward argument via wireless comms, even though she knew it was just a waste of oxygen. She caught intermittent snippets of an argument via the comms. It seemed like there was a certain man who wanted to forcefully snatch away the wireless comms, and was causing havoc right now.

Did the Chief Engineer Adelaide von Schugel exchange his conscience with talent? Though there were many examples of talented people with questionable ethics, this is the first time in my life I have met someone with such a huge difference between his talent and his personality.

It wasn't clear whether the world hated me, or was this the devil cursing me? However paranormal existences like magic exist in this world, this must be the handiwork of that devil X—Tanya could not help but lament.

[Second Lieutenant Degurechaff! Why did you mess it up again?!]

It seems like the hard-fought battle by the Air Control Officer was fruitless, the wireless comms was snatched away from the evil scientist after all. Even so, Tanya could not help but thank the fact that the Control Officer had at least tried to protect the wireless comms. *Since the evil scientist is now obstructing me, I have no choice but to use my right to self defense. What a world, where one has to always fend for himself.*

If I had to describe it I would only say one thing: “Where? Where is the law and order? The whole world wants to know.”

Right now, I have the upmost respect for jurists from the bottom of my heart. It doesn't matter if it is a formality, please re-establish law and order in the world.

[I'm the one who should say that!]

After all, even a simple explosive interruption spell could not be cast properly because of the Orb's ridiculously complex structure. The number of explosions caused by the receiver going out of control far exceeds those triggered by spells.

When I heard that we were conducting a flying experiment, I didn't expect that I would experience the greatness and difficulty of “flight” again. Even though I'm not one of the Wright Brothers, I still experienced firsthand that the pursuit of flight technology was just a thin line away from falling to one's death. Moreover, they flew on their own, bearing all the risks by themselves, so it wasn't that bad.

But Chief Engineer Adelaide von Schugel didn't fly on his own, but ask others to do so in his stead. He was even capricious enough to say things like “safety mechanisms dull engineering aesthetics.” I simply couldn't believe my own ears when I heard that.

The moment when the experiment could finally continue normally, he would add in experiment itineraries and side projects that didn't make any sense, forcing me to submit a unit transfer request at the time. Unfortunately, my request was revoked. But why? The answer was extremely unreasonable: “Because you are the only one who could conduct the experiment normally.” Not only that, the HR officer in charge even told me that I have to step over my predecessor's corpse and move forward.

At first I thought he meant that by metaphorically, but it seems that he meant it by literally. Even fighting at the frontlines has a higher survival rate than this

assignment. ...A few days ago, I was notified that I met the requirement to apply for a Purple Heart¹ decoration.

[Isn't this because of your lack of concentration! And you still dare to call yourself a soldier?!]

I endured the insults and abuse from Chief Engineer Adelaide von Schugel while suppressing the tempting urge of swearing back. I didn't ask for this in the first place, and this is definitely not an enjoyable job but I'm still hundred percent a soldier.

[I have no doubts on being a proud soldier of the Empire! But the responsibility of a soldier is to operate weapons. There is no way my job requires me to be at the whims of flawed machinery!]

The actual problem was that Tanya believed the job of an Imperial soldier was simply to fight in battle with a rifle and an Operation Orb in each hand. No matter how it was twisted, this didn't entail carrying a defective weapon that might explode at any time. A soldier who was issued with a broken rifle or a malfunctioning Operation Orb would have the right to complain. At least this was how things was supposed to work in the Empire.

Moreover, in harsh modern warfare, the most important quality for mage's equipment is reliability and durability. This was a common knowledge even for the new recruits. Not only for mages, all military equipment was supposed to have reliability and durability as the first priority. Frankly speaking, equipment that focused on one-time usage was not suitable for war at all.

This logic was the same as racing car which focused purely on racing performance but wasn't built to endure the wear and tear from continued usage. Weapons that weren't rugged enough to withstand rough handling by soldiers were meaningless in a battlefield.

¹ The **Purple Heart** is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those wounded or killed while serving, on or after April 5, 1917, with the U.S. military.

[What? You are saying it's a defective machine again!?!]

Of course, the military did know the necessity of technical validation. In order to flaunt their technical expertise for political propaganda, they would create equipment which focused on one single aspect in order to break standing records from time to time. Fashioning equipment to achieve world records was a different matter. However, the prototype orb issued to Tanya was considered as “the main candidate for the next generation,” something to be used by the masses.

This maniac, is he even capable of developing normal weapons? He is obviously immersed in his own world. Tanya doubted the common sense of the Chief Engineer and why the Inspector General of Logistics Office approve the development of this thing.

This world was really filled with inconceivable things.

[How is an Operation Orb that suddenly malfunctions at this altitude normal?!]

It was the same for aircraft. A plane with an engine that stops functioning all of a sudden were called killing machines. If the defects were horrendous, it might even be awarded the honour of the title [Widow Maker]. Compared with these, the problem of this prototype was worse. After all, just using it *normally* was a miracle.

Not only did it lose control and break down immediately, the power output lacked stability with no reliability to speak of. I had a strong feeling this was not a problem of it being a weapon or not.

[It's because you fools break it so lightly! Why do you people so easily keep breaking my precision machinery?!]

[It is because the structure you designed is too fragile. Do you really understand the meaning of mil-spec?]



TUE!!

Nein,
mein
Herr!!

This maniac did not comprehend the meaning of military usage at all. Although in terms of design, he did fulfill all the specifications that the military requested for the prototype .

Even if it was just experimental numbers under certain constraints, it had the potential of surpassing the current Mage altitude limit to engaging bomber planes, dramatically increasing the strategic value of mages. In theory, burst firepower could increase by four-fold. Undoubtedly, this would increase the existing mage's firepower tremendously.

But that was only possible if this prototype could function properly. This was common sense, but frankly speaking, an Operation Orb that required artistic or laboratory-level maintenance was useless. I really felt like asking him, was he trying to create a purebred horse that only needed to unleash its maximum performance for a short burst during a race ?

In the first place, the Operation Orb is a precision machine that only requires simple monthly maintenance. In comparison, this prototype requires the entire technician team to conduct maintenance after each use. Not only that, this was done by the Department of Logistics—with the best logistical support equipment and staffed by technical experts... I'm guessing he forgot the word [maintainability].

This far exceeds the maintenance standards at the front. This might be the right way to approach it for the sake of technical validation since there were only a few prototypes, but one couldn't help but wonder if the problem of operating it under normal circumstances could ever be solved.

[Why can't you understand how revolutionary this quad-core synchronization is?]

[I admit it is revolutionary...but I have also told you countless time that I hope you can produce something that can be used normally.]

[It works in theory! I'm the one who should ask, why can't you make it work properly?!]

He might be the chief engineer in charge of developing new technologies, but the way he acts is more a scholar and thus, he was able say these troubling words with a straight face.

Based on Tanya's Human Resource Theory (tainted by her biases), if she had to work alongside a scientist in the future, there is only one point she needs to pay special attention to.

And that was—whether or not he was a lunatic. Before discussing about his management capacity, you only need to note if it was possible to communicate with them during work.

By the way, people often say that there was only a thin line between madness and genius, but for Tanya, the method of differentiating them was simple. After a conversation, if you couldn't resist to emptying your entire magazine into him, then he's a madman, but if you are able to have a conversation with him normally next time, then he's a genius.

[Professor Schugel! All I expected is an Operation Orb that can be used practically!]

[That's the objective of this experiment! Don't you even know the cycle of PDCA!]

...If I could use the backup orb in my hand and smash him, it would feel so good—No, people who can't help having such thoughts were psychopaths. If not for my rationality reminding me that I shouldn't do that, I'm sure this pair of hands would be tainted red.

Needless to say, Tanya was familiar with the PDCA cycle. The “Plan, Do, Check, Act” cycle process was well known. Tanya didn't have any comments about it.

In fact, she agreed strongly with the implementation of this process. And because of this, all she wanted to say was, “Please be more serious in checking finished product.”

From the user-perspective, this was not a simple defect that could be fixed with a few adjustments. There were way too many severe errors, problems and flaws. If not for her confidentiality obligations and the safety mechanism embedded, she would have thrown this away long ago.

Not only that, even the safety mechanism couldn’t safeguard everything. It worked fine and prevents the worst situation from happening, but it couldn’t completely prevent mana from going out of control. One couldn’t help but keep the worst scenario in mind all the time—which was the electric circuit blowing out and the orb becoming a useless piece of junk.

In the very worst case scenario, if the explosion shrapnel hits and ignites the oxygen tank, it would be an extremely unpleasant situation. Based on previous incidents, the higher ups have issued a specially-made parachute with reinforced and improved structure, made from anti-knife and anti-fire fibres—but even with these, it was not a hundred percent safe.

If the testing personnel were to lose consciousness, one would still worry about the parachute deploying automatically. Moreover, regardless of the scale of the explosion, if one was unlucky enough to have the rope wrapped around their neck, there’s a high chance that they might suffocate to death before plummeting to the ground. That was a huge concern too.

Mankind have already learned through experience that the world acts in accordance to Murphy’s Law¹: anything that can go wrong, will. An employee that *might* misbehave will *certainly* create trouble one day. For example, it was common sense for Human Resources management to not let bankrupt employee

¹ **Murphy’s Law**, According to the findings of a study done by Captain Edward Aloysius Murphy, Jr. of the United States Army Air Corps, he concluded that [Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.] Which then led to the observation that [If anything bad can happen, it probably will.

take on jobs involving money. The same applied here as well. Using a orb that might explode anytime was the same as waiting for it to explode in the air.

After landing, it was time to submit a transfer request seriously—Tanya nodded her head strongly to express her determination. She swore in her heart that in the worst situation, even if it left a bad impression on her superiors, she would be determined to fight to the end with Human Resources.

If this went on, it wouldn't matter how many lives she had. In this hopeless environment, her position as a member of the training unit was her only hope. Although she did use this as an excuse, begging to be involved officially with the trainer team, it was not enough. She couldn't simply rely on probing lightly anymore. If there wasn't an official request to transfer units, there was a very high chance she would become a sacrificial lamb in the lunatic's experiment. It was best to submit the request as soon as possible.

That was it. After she completed her outstanding tasks after landing, she started writing immediately.

Imperial Military Inspector General of Logistics Office, Technological Research Branch

[Request to change assignment] as per official guidelines. That bloodcurdling thought was being reflected on because of the notification about changing assignments from Mage Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff. As a strict bureaucratic organization, when the official request for a change of assignment came, the administration branch of the technical department needed to process her request dutifully.

The group came to a consensus that the request for an assignment change was not made on a whim. At any rate, if they included the unofficial requests for a change of assignment, this would have been the fourth time.

So far, it was a relief that the informal hearings were not submitted together with official documents. However, the number of times were piling up, and it was

becoming a very pressing matter. It was just a matter of time, wasn't it? Inevitably, the official request came. When Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff's official Assignment Change Request papers reached the technical department's management, they all grabbed their heads troublingly.

[So, what to do? For the time being, all official documents are here. Should we accept her request?]

They already persuaded her to stay three times, but she had reached the limits of her patience and submitted her assignment change request officially.

From the perspective of personnel management, they had breathing room to spare on the northern frontlines. Taking into account political and international relations, now was the best time to give young soldiers postings that would allow them stay at the backlines, since it was frowned upon to do otherwise.

That's why for the Inspector General's Office, the posting for Second Lieutenant Degurechaff wouldn't be too difficult. However, even if the unit she would be posted to didn't mind, they were reluctant to let this talent go.

[Impossible. She is the only one who can just barely meet Schugel's standards.]

Instead of any outstanding capability, it would be closer to the truth to describe the genius of Chief Engineer Schugel as his only redeeming point. The development of the next generation Orb involved data collection at the basic level with the goal of researching advanced technologies. Even conservatively speaking, the standards demanded by the Logistics Command of the Inspector General's Office were very ambitious. Even though he only did so on paper, he met all the basic requirements they wanted for the Type 95.

[That is true. The research finally showed signs of bearing fruit...we should take that into account as well, no?]

Even in the Empire, the leader in magic technology and scientific research, he was a pioneer in his field. Although magic was gaining traction in being recognized as a field of science, there were still vague elements and large numbers of errors during usage. His contribution in stabilizing the technology and pushing its development in the right direction and improving it was tremendous.

Just taking the research element into consideration, the data and theoretical insight due to the Type 95 was huge progress—that was just the evaluation from the research standpoint. For the research committee, it would be enough if the experiments brought about revolutionary advancement, but for the Logistical Command of the Inspector General's Office, what they needed were tools that could withstand the rugged military operations, so they had to judge these issues while taking the whole scenario into account.

However, that was only from the research evaluation. Maybe, for a research institute, the fact that it was a groundbreaking technology was more than enough. But for the military, matters of logistics, meaning the capability to be used in the field reliably, was indispensable and a comprehensive judgement was required.

[Conversely, it would be regrettable if we lose someone who can somehow manage to use the Type 95 Orb.]

[We have to think about this for the long term. We don't have any excellent testing personnel to replace her.]

The higher authorities in attendance were relaying their concerns of a valuable and talented mage being wasted unnecessarily. There was the issue of maintaining constant technological progress to keep up competition with other nations. For that end, sacrificing lives for the sake of technological advances were rare, but not zero.

The intense development of weapons due to national defence concerns resulted in accidents happening in units that were understaffed. The list of people who died while on duty was anything but short.

[I agree with you. Thinking about it long term, the retention and nurturing of mages is an issue the Empire should be worried about.]

[Also, if I have to say... Shouldn't we consider the issue of her age? She might be extremely talented, but she is still a young girl. It's too cruel for her to be relegated to Engineer Schugel's plaything.]

For the Empire, the expanding number of sailors and aerial mages were unit types that needed a lot of training hours to improve the quality of each soldier. This played an important factor in their mind too. Operation Orbs and ships could be mass-produced, but competent and experienced core personnel could not be nurtured as easily.

On this point, Tanya was not only the youngest of those with combat experience, she was also a mage who had graduated from Officer Cadet School, a precious existence. It would be a pity if she was wasted just like that. On top of that, there was also the troublesome political consideration that Elinium Factory wasn't the only place that was gunning for the seat of "developer of the Empire's next generation Operation Orb." If the Silver Wings Assault Medal recipient was to die in the line of duty, it would start a political storm. Everyone present could only pray that this wouldn't happen.

Most importantly, in the eyes of anyone with a shred of conscience, Second Lieutenant Degurechaff was simply too young. Even if they were reluctant to look overly conscientious, it was a fact that her ability would rise further with time. Her performance so far made it clear she had boundless potential in her military career. If they were considering about whether to sacrifice her in the first place, she wasn't a person that should be wasted in such a way.

The higher echelons of the military agreed to her posting here, but at the same time, assigned her under the Training Department. Their message was obvious, "You can do whatever you want to her, but return her in one piece (alive)."

[Losing the Type 95 Orb would be a pity too, that's why we are so troubled!]

One of the participants said with his head in his arms, exasperating the dilemma they were in.

[Frankly speaking, the experiment also yielded results. The technological advancement was by no means small for the Empire.]

However, the participants' comments have also indicated that they are in distress.

The expected returns from the experiment was enticing enough for one of the higher ups to approve a certain level of risk. That was why they devoted endless budget into the development of the Type 95. And now, they were finally able to see a glimmer of hope for the huge investments they had made.

The Empire had the advantage of technology in terms of their military strength. One of the main pillars supporting this advantage was the revolutionary advances in magic technology. This experiment had the potential of pushing that technology even further. Wasn't this great reward worth the development funds? Just the proving of concept for the Orb Core Synchronizing technology was enough to dramatically improve the capabilities of mages.

[I acknowledge the significance of the four-core synchronization technology—but we still haven't figured out how to implement it for practical usage, right?!]

And of course, the opposition also admitted what this technology represented. They readily praised the revolutionary technology, and didn't object to the scientific study of magic with the full support of the Empire. The policy of developing this technology did produce great benefits. But to them, the development of the Type 95 included some parts they felt were not worth the cost.

After all, according to the feedback of the user, theoretical issues aside, there were too many problems in practical application. Apart from that, the Type 95 included advanced and revolutionary designs that weren't just "next generation," but two or three generations ahead. It made them doubt if practical implementation was even possible in this era. That was the reason they had been repeatedly going about this circular argument.

The thing that stopped this debate was their observation of a single report.

[Have you all read the technical report? Second Lieutenant Degurechaff analyzed it very clearly. According to this, practical usage is impossible no matter how much mana you have.]

The Type 95 experiment report showed adept analytical ability, giving the reader the steady feeling that the author wrote it as a veteran in this academic field. Some of the people within the department were surprised by this, thinking that this wasn't content that a ten-year old could write. A few even suspected that the report wasn't written by her at all.

On one part, there were many doubts about whether she really did write this herself, but she was cleared of suspicion.

Despite that, the technical report was rigorous and well thought out. According to investigation, this report was written by Tanya herself. Too young to attend youth school (equivalent to middle school) as she was only ten years old, Tanya already had enough mana to meet the standard as a mage. From the talent and mana pool she had, her future was bright. But even this excellent mage officer who bloomed early couldn't use this prototype reliably or steadily.

[Casting multiple spells, an increase in range and power... These are all excellent improvements, but if the operation time is dropped to a fatal level, there's no point in using it.]

Even though the goal was a proof of concept, if the consumption rate rendered normal combat functions unsustainable, the quad core system would just be a flawed design. It might enhance firepower momentarily but in exchange for drastically shortening its operation time, unacceptable.

On a certain level, a constructive evaluation system might work here. For example, investigating the flaws of the advanced technology was also an important responsibility for the proof of concept. However, if the reason behind the rapid mana depletion rate was due to its basic structure, it wouldn't help at all.

[Our objective from the very start was to confirm the viability of the theory and improve our technology. This is still within acceptable margins.]

On the other hand, the faction that proposed the research be continued agreed that combat sustainability was a flaw. In their eyes, this wasn't an issue since the main objective was to show simply proof of concept. At the very least, the concept had no problems. This was the view of the technology faction that wasn't particularly concerned about the limitations of practical applications.

The technological race between the Great Powers had reached harsh levels. From their point of view, it was natural to wish that the potential of the Type 95 would ensure their Fatherland's technological advantage. Falling behind in the technological race presented an enormous threat, while gaining an advantage would ensure overwhelming returns. That was the reason they were hoping so earnestly for their improvement in technology by leaps and bounds. With this being a possibility, they could accept the costs of the entire Type 95 project.

[Regardless of how much potential it holds, the military doesn't have the budget to splurge.]

However, this was just the opinion of the research personnel and their backers, the military that will exploit all sorts of weapons sees it differently. A normal Orb already cost as much as a primary weapon. This one-time-usage custom Orb that might break down anytime had already pushed development costs far beyond its allocated budget.

It was consuming an unbelievable amount of money, thus hesitation with putting in yet more funds was growing stronger.

This made them even more hesitant about increasing the budget after they had already sunk an unbelievable amount of money in. The return of investment would probably be better if they used the budget elsewhere. Such an opinion made sense. The Empire was strong, and while the budget for the military might be plentiful, it

wasn't unlimited. Since it was limited, they would need to always strive for efficiency.

[Even so, there is still a chance of realizing the goal of stabilizing mana in its physical form. Isn't that more than enough reason to continue the experiment?]

[Are you suggesting that we pursue the path of alchemy? We can't keep wasting our limited budget and manpower.]

Also, the opinion of both sides remained parallel on this point— Whether stabilizing mana in its physical form was possible. The logical flow was obvious. Since the mana consumption of the Orb was intense, sustaining combat prowess during battle would be difficult. Engineering Director Adelaide von Schugel also knew this.

As for the countermeasures for this problem, his conclusion was to store mana like electricity in batteries to solve the problems. The conversion of mana to another form in order to store it was something many people wanted to achieve, only to give up after making no progress.

By optimizing the usage of mana with an Operation Orb, one could interfere with reality with their will. This interference then manifested itself in the physical world. This was the basic principle of spells used by mages.

Of course, this phenomenon was temporary. Assuming someone willed for an explosion to happen, it would appear in the physical world. As it was a temporary phenomenon, the mana would disperse after the explosion was over, and couldn't be turned inert. In that case, there only need to be the “will” to turn the phenomenon inert in the physical world.

Such a concept had already been researched right after the practical implementation of the Operation Orb. However, the idea of turning mana inert through the usage of mana had been tried countless times, merely increasing the number of failed attempts.

Research done optimistically in working toward practical implementation already resulted in a mountain of unsuccessful tries. All the Great Powers who invested seriously into this had already given up.

Interfering with the will interfering with the world in order to create a permanent object in the physical world. This sounded easy, but it was akin to twisting the law of physics permanently. This was venturing into the realm of ancient alchemy.

That was how unrealistic this technology was. At least in the eyes of soldiers who were first of all, pragmatists. From their viewpoint, exaggerating new technologies only made them skeptical—and this was already seen as an outdated theory.

It was so well known that the soldiers involved in the development and even everyone working in a magic-related industry knew about it. In a way, it was a dream just like alchemy, a theory that was only possible in the far future.

It required a huge amount of mana to interfere with the laws of nature for long periods of time. A dual-core system is the minimum requirement in order to allow for instantaneous injection of the necessary amount of mana. Similarly, the stabilization process would require another same number of cores. As such, at least four cores were needed to be synchronized and it further required precise control in order to handle the different processes simultaneously. Hence, up until now it has only ever been a theory yet to be put to practice.

[Four-core synchronization has already been achieved, so we can't deny the possibility.]

[With the condition it is in, there is no way we can hope for a perfect synchronization. Even the only one who can use it properly, Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff, is operating at far below “standard” proficiency.]

That was why the “continued development” faction and “halt research” faction couldn't come to a consensus despite observing the same results. The former saw hope while the latter saw futility. Both factions were logical in their own right. Truthfully speaking, the Orb that would cause accidents lacked credibility. Of

course, no prototype weapon was perfect from the get-go, so this was within everyone's expectation.

However, no other weapon had such a history of consecutive serious accidents. According to reports, Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff was able to survive each time by a hair's breadth, which revealed just how intense those incidents were. And after conducting all those experiments, the result was an Orb that was barely operational.

But this much alone was already enough to demonstrate the amount of progress that have been made when compared to the past. Therefore, when the soldiers expressed their concern about how wasteful the experiments were, the mid-level human resources officer raised a point from a different perspective.

[By the way, why her?]

This was just an innocent question. On the other hand, it was an intriguing point. Judging from her history, Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff wasn't a bad choice, but there were hordes of soldiers that outshined her. But amongst all of them, why could she operate the Orb more successfully than everyone else? By finding out the secret behind her success, they should be able to find the answer to their doubts. Once they realized this, they agreed that there was value in exploring the question in depth.

[No, you have it backwards. We should think about why did she succeed?]

[What is the reason behind her selection? Who chose her?]

After all these discussions, the Inspector General of Logistics who was chairing the meeting asked the most basic question. He knew that the Manpower Branch serving under the Inspector General of the Logistics Office approved of this posting, but that was only possible if someone submitted a request to the Manpower Branch. In that case, the request document will record the reason for her selection.

When they were asked by their senior officer, the young admin officers flipped through the documents to find the document detailing the original personnel request form. They missed out on this point so far, but all the answers were written on it.

[Engineering Director Schugel was the one who chose her. He mentioned that she is the one most likely to use the Orb successfully.]

[How did he know that?]

Learning from the tragic failure of the former test personnel, he must have some basis for as to why he requested for the service of Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff. Why did he headhunt for such a talent from the frontlines? Was it because of her trait, skill, or some other reason? How intriguing.

But in reality, Engineering Director Schugel wrote down a simple reason on his request form.

[...It says, if she had not gotten use to the current model, she would not use the prototype recklessly in the same manner.]

In a way, this was the common trait of researching Orbs. His rationale was spot on. The quad core structure was completely different than normal Orbs. Hence, it would be difficult to channel mana by using the old ways.

Children are more flexible in their thinking; just by telling them “even if the mana flow feels wrong, don’t go against it,” they will be able to grasp the gist of it. If it was a child who matured early like Tanya, it was more likely for her to embrace this feeling, understand the operational principle and learn to operate this new technology. It was a splendid and logical insight.

Everyone understood this point... and because they understand, everyone of them groaned. This was a sound of finding out something unpleasant.

[...Hey, isn't a mage who is skilled but unfamiliar with the old model Operational Orbs very hard to come by?]

That's obvious. Even if you search through all available personnel in the Imperial army, it would be difficult to find a suitable candidate that could fulfil these conditions. Naturally, the minimum condition of a next generation weapon was that majority of the mages must be able to use it proficiently. If full operational capability wasn't possible, there would be no point in developing it.

Judging from the results, the request form was very meaningful. It was telling of how high the hurdle was in order to use the Type 95. It could be predicted that the next generation model could not be used unless they retrain all serving mages and build a new training system from scratch. The difficulty in usage was higher than the old Orb, so there would be a need to reevaluate the training course for new recruits.

Even if all these could be realized, just considering the efficiency, reliability and cost, it would make anyone hesitant on mass-producing it. With the super-advanced skills needed to operate it normally, it would not be surprising if accidents occur at any time.

[Our budget is limited. It is too difficult to utilize properly.]

[We have already obtained new technology in terms of the safety function for Operation Orbs. It's probably time to wrap things up?]

In conclusion, it would be more appropriate to halt development. At the very least, scale down the development scale. The atmosphere in the conference room leaned towards this proposal, and not without reason.

No matter how enticing this technology was, if it couldn't be implemented in the near future, the military would have to give it up. For the Imperial army, budget and manpower wasn't something they could splurge.

[Increasing firepower sounds tempting, but if quad core couldn't work, how about using dual core?]

[That is true. Wouldn't synchronization be easier for dual core?]

[The difficulty in controls would be lower.]

Compared to quad core synchronization, dual core was much simpler. Ironically, the one who answered this question was from the research department that supported continued development. It was true that compared to quad core, dual core would be much easier.

[Even so, "the structure was still too complicated, inefficiency couldn't be prevented." That is the findings of the research department.]

In the end, the process of synchronization was a new function that was difficult to understand. They didn't have much hope on improvements in efficiency.

[In that case, it would be easier to just hold two Operation Orbs.]

[There would be no point in further debate if the combat efficiency is too low. Seems that synchronization technology is still too early for us.]

The meeting ended with this concluding statement.

The realm beyond the perception of senses

[Everyone, this is serious.]

In a corner of the realm of the gods, the [existences] there were honestly troubled. This wasn't just what they were thinking honestly, but stemmed from their goodwill as well.

[As everyone knows, the number of humans with faith is decreasing rapidly.]

[It is too difficult to develop a civilization while maintaining religious devotion.]

Be it leading man to a higher plane of existence or staying true to the basic policy of nonintervention, the “circle of rebirth” system was reaching its limits.

The more the world develops and the people become happy, the further the erosion of faith. There were no nightmares worse than that for the system.

[What about the test conducted earlier?]

[It is less effective than expected. Even after they acknowledged supernatural phenomenon, there was no further reaction.]

The archangel with extremist view believed that they should trigger supernatural phenomenon to stir the faith of the people. They tried mimicking the event of Moses and displayed supernatural phenomenon, but the results were disappointing. It would be explained by science one day.

The reaction of the people to supernatural phenomenon was that it could not be understood as of now. Since they couldn't understand it, it merely became the subject of their research.

[It's not going well after all.]

[But why? In the past, we just need to talk to them, and they will understand that we are gods.]

[They even proactively called out for us.]

That's right. During the era when faith was deep, they could communicate easily by conversing with them. Not only that, some even took the initiative to seek the presence of the gods. But that was rare nowadays. Voices seeking redemption came up just as seldom.

Why was that? They couldn't understand no matter how hard they thought; it was important to investigate the successful cases as well. That was a rational approach. And so, they took action with sublime ideas and sense of duty, researching all the examples from mythology to the modern age. For them, the age of mythology was just a past memory. If they wished to investigate them one by one, it was possible to complete such a task.

[...The answer lies in the grace of the gods right?]

From the conclusion, this was a practical answer.

[What do you mean?]

[In the past, before men developed their civilization, we intervened and protected them when they suffered disaster they couldn't avert themselves.]

For modern nations, a storm was no longer a threat. Typhoons couldn't destroy a country anymore; it couldn't even crack the beams of a building. For most nations, storms and floods would only disable the functionalities of a city.

In contrast to the past, entire farmlands would be devastated from a storm, people washed away by the flood and families broken because of catastrophes. That was why the gods restrained themselves, and didn't intervene if the people didn't will for it. And thus they were forgotten by men.

Prompting men to be independent was to let them grow, which was an important element in order for them to move on to a higher plane of thought. That was why no one expected that it would also lead to men losing faith.

The people from ancient times would praise the grace of gods, and the empire of Rome was devoted to the gods. After the fall of Rome, the church controlled the entire middle ages in the name of God. However, the lords advocated the divine right of kings, eroding the powers of the church gradually. Then, scientists no longer sought religious devotion, instead seeking for the truth of the world created by gods. As a result, this made men lose their religious faith over time.

[That's right, as civilization is developing at a good pace, we decided that intervening would stunt their growth, that's why we left them be.]

[But on the other hand, isn't that the main reason why it is hard for them to acknowledge us?]

From their perspective, they have no intention of hindering the growth of mankind. In fact, this was the result they were hoping for in their initial plan.

To seek the truth behind the workings of the gods. The natural sciences which stemmed from such thoughts was very much welcomed and not detested. They evolved from celebrating the idea of not thinking for themselves, into the worship of understanding the foundation of our very nature. Following this logic, the people will reach a higher level of philosophy. The gods think this was a memorable first step.

However, the plan backfired and led to serious problems. And it was unstoppable. After all, there were too many worlds that had been cultivated with such a standard model.

[Ughhh, if that was the case, it would be very difficult.]

The group fell into deep thought. If they couldn't solve the problem with simple amendments, the issue would take a lot of effort to settle. That would be very troublesome. And it could be foreseen that the longer they leave the problem alone, the worse it would get.

[Ideas, anyone?]

At this moment, the angel of wisdom did not let down the expectations placed on him, and outlined a proposal he had after considering the issue carefully. First, he postulated that there wasn't any problem with their policy. Basically, if they could come up with a system to make up for the loss in faith, all would be well.

[And so, we have to make a minute adjustment after all, in order to stir the faith of the people.]

This proposal was accepted almost unanimously. However, they had already exhausted all the methods they could think of.

[I understand the direction you are proposing. But what should we do specifically?

[I am not very confident about this, but how about bestowing a new holy relic¹ to the world?]

[Hmm? What do you mean?]

Talking about holy relics, the ones already bestowed to the world were as plentiful as the stars. Although the distribution was uneven because of the country and geography, the number was more than enough. In terms of raising faith, this method wasn't very successful. It was treasured by the people because of its historical significance at the very most.

[The bestowed holy relic is treasured and carefully preserved, fulfilling its role in letting the masses know about the grace of the gods.]

However, they didn't know the actual status of the divine relics. They lived for too long after all. They still have the memories of the time they bestowed the holy relics to men, but they didn't pay attention to later developments. They only

¹ [**Holy Relic**] Items such as human remains or miraculous tools. It is very dangerous, so please do not retort about them.

discovered that the divine relic had been relegated to decorations after investigations.

[I see, that's why they have forgotten about faith and prayers. How ironic...]

They were no longer an essential existence. That was all there was to it, but they couldn't help feeling emotional about it. However they didn't plan to force the people to accept religion one-sidedly.

But if they don't do so, it was inevitable that the system will yield depressing results. To let people seek to understand faith spontaneously, shouldn't they bestow divine relics periodically in necessary places?

They agreed that this opinion was worth a try.

[In that case, let's teach them words of prayer, and bestow a divine relic they need onto the world.]

[A splendid idea. Let's do it.]

[I just happen to have something suitable.]

And so, the details were decided rather quickly. Even in the eyes of these gods with their slow and easy-going nature, the problems that appeared were rather serious. And so they took the entire discussion seriously, and did not slip up in a fashion that was unique to the gods of mythology, scrutinizing the process faithfully.

[Oh?]

[Someone in the mortal world is researching a product that is just a step from the realm of the gods—which they should be able to realize about one thousand years in the future.]

[Oh, an outlier. Can we contact this human?]

It was rare, but during many past instances in various world, there were humans who reached a realm very close to the gods through their research of natural sciences. Such cases were rare and exceptional, but there was still precedence. In the current circumstances, everyone felt that this was the best way.

[He should realize by now that he has ways to go. If we show him the works of the gods, he would be quite grateful.]

[Should we bestow the holy relic right there?]

[No, a miracle is what we need to bestow.]

[A miracle?]



In this world, good news always seemed to be bundled with bad news. Second Lieutenant Mage Tanya Degurechaff agreed with this wholeheartedly.

It was just an internal notice for now, but the higher ups were cutting off the budget. That was probably a hint that the development of the Type 95 would be terminated. At the same time, the Human Resources Department had news for her to focus on conducting training, which was just fine with her.

The halt in the development of the flawed Orb and her return to the training unit was joyous news. The only problem was that this was just an internal memo, and wasn't set in stone yet.

The decision would probably be upheld though. This was wonderful news since she didn't need to risk her life any longer.

But the bad news was that madman changed his attitude suddenly when the development couldn't proceed any further, and his experiments were halted because it was too dangerous. It would be great if he were to lose face and become docile. However, this hope was shattered and that lunatic seemed to have the ability to receive radio waves from god knows where.

One day, he suddenly shouted that divine inspiration struck and that "it will definitely work now!" However, that lunatic actually judged that the risk of this experiment was too high back when he was sane. If he forcefully conducted it while his mental strain was at his limits, the results would probably not be pretty.

And worst of all, with the project on the verge of being terminated, the other researchers began to waver. Wanting to see their efforts bear fruit—such a mindset of the researchers resulted in them making hallowed resistance. It was easy for that lunatic to brush the dissidents aside in such a situation.

And so, despite surviving so long, Tanya couldn't stop them from conducting an experiment that was akin to playing catch with a bomb, which would make any sane scientist frown.

In name, the experiment is to evoke a permanent physical phenomenon by multiple interference in the coordinates where the mana materializes—known to laymen as stabilizing mana in its physical form, a whimsical and delusional idea.

The ultimate goal of the Type 95 development was to conduct such an experiment successfully. It was just that the probability of success was so low that it made others dubious. No matter how you looked at it, it would end in failure. The theory appeared logical and was well known, even Tanya had heard about it before.

Because of the delicate internal structure of the Type 95, it was fragile and difficult to maintain and operate reliably. To overcome this problem, mana was needed to make the world acknowledge its existence and solidify its structure through stabilizing mana conversation in its physical form to reinforce its operation.

And theoretically, the Type 95 could realize this by synchronizing the quad core system and lay the foundation for this technology. Even if it was doomed to fail, there was a need to challenge the technological finale of the Type 95. There was great significance just in confirming the foundation of this technology.

When she heard this explanation, she felt the conversation was similar to the officers fighting over budget allocation. The presentation was elegant and noble, but she was certain that this experiment stemmed from the curiosity of that madman. Going about his hollowed speech, with no plans to stop the experiment even if the practical problems were pointed out.

If he was allowed to strongarm his way through, the experiment would definitely conducted on the faulty premise that he would be extremely lucky during the test.

[Lieutenant, are you ready?]

And of course, he must understand how dangerous this experiment was. Since he knew, how could he show such a jubilant expression? This made others question the mental stability of Engineering Director Adelaide von Schugel. I really wish he could see the situation around him.

At a glance, the surroundings were completely barren, the place was vast enough to conduct live ammunition exercise. When she tried to search for man-made structures, the only things Tanya could find was the measuring apparatus and the professor. The rest of the development team members who were well aware of the danger and kept a large distance away, staying in the observation lab and watched through the observation equipment. No one was willing to walk through the proper procedures in checking for errors on the ground.

In conclusion, all personnel involved kept far, far away with the assumption that there would be a huge explosion.

[Professor, can't you stop the experiment? According to calculations, the worst case scenario would be the entire testing area being blown away along with us.]

And that was why Tanya was still persistent about halting the experiment at this late stage. The only one who had complete faith in Tanya achieving perfect control was Engineering Director Adelaide von Schugel. Having gotten used to this, the thoughtful development team members arranged the medical team to be on standby in full gear.

They even asked specifically for a veteran medical team and requisitioned for a fully equipped field hospital.

[Scientific progress is always accompanied with sacrifices. Of course, it's not just you. I will be right here too. Are there any other questions?]

Everyone was very worried about this experiment; only Engineering Director Adelaide von Schugel was cheerful as usual and brimming with confidence.

It would feel so good if I can punch that smiling face of his.

[Pardon me for being blunt, but I hope you can project your high ideals in another way.]

Dying from an explosion of your own invention might be exactly what you want. In a way, you are getting what you deserve. But the problem is, why am I the one who has to accompany this suicidal lunatic? In a way, I am being forced to kill myself. Tanya expressed her true feelings by politely mincing her words and stating it in a roundabout way.

[...? As a scientist, I have to stay true to my research. Stop the chatter and begin.]

However, Tanya was helpless against lunatics with high ideals. *If you want to die, just die on your own. Try not to trouble others around you. If you can't, then at the very least don't trouble me.*

[I am a soldier, not a scientist.]

Also, Tanya was a professional soldier, no matter what, committing suicide together with a scientist was not part of her job description.

[I will order you then. Cut the crap and get on with it.]

In response to her protest, the scientist hit the bullseye in a way. Since she was a soldier, then she had to obey the orders coming from her chain of command. It was frustrating, but that's the way it was.

[...Beginning supplying mana to the Type 95.]

Having no other choice, Tanya could only lament her misfortune as she started her work at hand, slowly, carefully injecting mana into the Type 95.

[Observation team acknowledging. Stay safe.]

Even such simple words of courtesy sounded ominous. She showed a pained expression and endured the terror of being blown up at any moment. To be frank, she felt her life was in greater danger than what she experienced in her previous job.

Be it the mage's tough protection barrier or protection membrane that guards against direct attacks, they were all phenomenon created through an Orb. Whenever Tanya thought about how she had to take the explosion with her body if the Orb explodes, she couldn't help but worry.

Before such a brutal and uneasy situation, an indescribable twisted expression appears on her face. When he saw her making such a face, Engineering Director Adelaide von Schugel even smiled. For Tanya, this was the face time she saw the professor smiling in a way that defused the tension and calmed her.

His expression seemed to be telling her not to worry.

[It's fine, you don't need to worry. This is guaranteed to work.]

Her doubt morphed into an alarm bell in Tanya's mind when she saw his eyes that was as clear as an evil cultist... It was warning her not to get involved with such a person.

[...Professor, why are you so confident?]

Tanya won't be surprised if this lunatic was wrong in the head, but the problem was in this situation. This was a danger she couldn't ignore, and it would affect her too.

[It's nothing, this is actually very simple.]

The professor opened his arms in an exaggerated way, looking as if he wanted to preach the truth about the world. Just this was enough to give Tanya the chills. Filled with confidence and making speeches as if one understood the principles behind reality? That was a symptom of a fanatic. The kind obsessed with a dangerous cult.

[...What do you mean?]

When handling a fanatic, a dangerous move would be to express your agreement or disagreement with an issue. She learnt that from her years in human resources

management. When an employee tendered their resignation because of influences from a dubious cult, she needed to maintain the attitude of “no comment.” Keep a large distance, and try to minimize misunderstandings when conversing.

That was why Tanya could only use a calm tone to stall for time through dialogue.

[I am the engineering director. Lieutenant, you are the main test pilot. This means that if we put aside our differences and work together, all our problems could be solved easily.]

That’s how evil cults were. Most of them start conversations with a normal tone and a face as if they understood everything, and spoke about things that sounded very reasonable on the surface.

[I received a divine inspiration some days ago.]

[...Divine inspiration?]

Ah, as expected. So that’s what it was? She thought it was just a metaphor in the beginning. The ominous feeling made her logical mind scream in disgust. She had an extremely bad feeling about this.

[That’s right. If we pray to god, the ones with faith will receive salvation.]

[——Eh——?!]

She was prepared for this, but she couldn’t help groaning. When she came to her senses, she sighed deeply. Pray...to god...for success? Did...a scientist just say that? When she thought this far, she realized this was impossible. Has he lost his mind while working on this project? That was really possible.

When she understood this, Tanya concluded that continuing the experiment would be too dangerous even if this was a military natured order. After judging so, she lowered the mana supply and activated the safety feature that would prevent the Orb from going out of control.

[The most important thing isn't pride, but humility.]

However, the safety function didn't function as it should. She kept her cool on the outside, but Tanya couldn't help feeling surprised, and reevaluated the Orb in her hand once again. It was the one she used in all sorts of experiment, the one she had grown familiar with. Inspecting the exterior, she could see several emergency safety devices attached to it... The device failed to launch? Which meant the feature was disabled... *He actually took such unnecessary measures.*

The only one who could do this was the director who was smiling calmly before her. This guy was serious. His demeanour always seemed a little crazy, that was why Tanya didn't notice.

[This is a good chance. Let us pray to the gods for our success.]

[Professor, aren't you an atheist?]

[The God of Invention has descended to my side. Right now, I am a devout believer.]

Oh no. There was no way to salvage the situation.

Just like its creator, the Type 95 started going out of control. Tanya tried to control it with her mana, but it wasn't responding. The circuitry was abnormal too.

If this went on, the mana will run amok. And the safety device wasn't functioning anymore.

[.....]

If she manually expel the mana, the entire balance would collapse and the structure would be doomed to fall apart. Hence, she continued injecting mana even though she knew it was dangerous; however, continuing to pump mana in will ultimately lead to the loss of control. Caught in this dilemma, there wasn't much difference from waiting for the Orb to go berserk in the future.

... At a time like this, it couldn't be help if an unpleasant future appeared crisply in her mind.

[If we become the believers of invention and pray earnestly, it will definitely work.]

[...By the way, what happens if I don't pray?]

[The two of us will become *martyrs*.]

The madman said this without hesitation. And the smile on his face was evidently the worse kind that showed pride in dying for his cause: it was a cheerful smile of someone who was about to blow himself up.

[You might want to call for a medic now. Or should I do you in right now?]

That was why Tanya wanted to kill this fellow with her own hands at the very least, since she was dead no matter what.

Kill this guy first, then get killed by his flawed Orb, at least she won't lose out. It was a sweet temptation. It wasn't an acceptable deal, but it was better than losing on all fronts. She was consoled by the concept of market fundamentalism.

[Calm down, Lieutenant. Didn't you meet with the god before? If both of us can trust god, we will be saved.]

When the killing intent hidden in her heart was about to manifest in reality, these words came from his mouth. Tanya unconsciously stopped her movement. *Hey, wait.*

[The mana observation gauges are destabilizing! It is going out of control!]

[How could it be!? The core is melting! All personnel evacuate!]

The observation team screamed. Even though she treated the screams as noise and ignored them, but Tanya felt it the moment she lost conscious.

She felt that devil—[Existence X], smiling maliciously at her. *Ah, I see.* The extraordinary [existence] that toys with reality. A devil that toys with humans and bore ill news.

[You set me up?! Damn devil!!!]

[The conclusion is, that thing you all are developing called the Elinium Type 95? We decided to bestow a miracle, and the lord agreed with us.]

When she came to her senses, she realized she was in a familiar space. It wasn't too long ago when she was welcomed by an [Existence X] that was less reasonable than he currently was. The reason for the visit this time was because that madman conducted a reckless experiment.

But that guy was just a mad scientist at the most, and not a fanatic. Judging from his earlier words, he was just a victim too. The mastermind must be Existence X and his gang. That lunatic was just being manipulated by them. Although I didn't even have a single shred of sympathy for him.

[Oh, I see.]

The existence before me is just a little more normal than before. In a sense, he is a fanatic one could still converse with...but being careless is prohibited. Simply said, they are just like people who had been poisoned by religion. It doesn't matter if they are gods or devils.

What I need to be careful of is that they might not try to convince me with logic, and force me to accept their values unilaterally. After all, their values are completely messed up. It might seem logical, but the content is the same as an incompetent employee.

I have to eliminate them. I can still stand lazy people. But all fanatics are all hardworking, no matter their level of competence. This is a praiseworthy virtue, but their element of "insanity" ruins everything.

[Next, allow me to congratulate you. The Lord accepts your ignorant and sinful existence, and has decided to guide you onto the right path.]

[It's not necessary.]

...Hey. They are being so direct? I did expect them to make a move, but a fastball right down the middle? To be honest, it feels great to be in control of someone's life, but it's a different matter if the one being manipulated is me. Why can't I decide my own life? Isn't my body the most basic existence that can be controlled by my will?

[Ah, don't worry. Your uneasiness stemmed from the fear that someone will force their ideals on you right?]

No, this feeling of uneasiness... How can I describe it? It is true that I am resistant about my future being decided by others against my will.

Be it my thoughts being controlled or being led on, I will feel extremely humiliated. Let those who want to be immersed in the world of stories indulge in communal fantasy. If this fantasy is beneficial, I will invest in it too; If there is nothing to gain, I wouldn't bother with it. If it will harm me, I will wake those bunch up from their dreams and let them eat mud in reality.

And the offensive minded action of forcing others to partake in communal fantasy would be resisted by me to the end as a human being. Freedom. This is my freedom. Don't anyone dare take it from me.

If my existence violates the freedom of others in contrary to my principles, it would be unpleasant, but still acceptable.

But I will never accept someone else threatening my freedom. In the past, I had the intellect and network to protect this freedom of mine...but right now, I only have the physical capability to protect my personal sovereignty, and understand the importance of this.

[So be at ease. Let us bestow your Operation Orb with blessings, and bring forth a miracle. After using the Orb, you will definitely understand the grace of god, and sing the words of prayer.]

[Words of prayer?]

[That's right. Words to praise the Lord that have been forgotten by your forebearers. It was not your fault that it wasn't passed down.]

[Of course. But that is not important to our discussion right now.]

How did he come up with such logic? Can someone explain to me? If you can, please do it now. I don't mind machine translation or verbal translations. Aside from fees for rushing the job, I will add in tips too. So please, someone tell me what this guy is trying to say.

[Like I said, the Lord will let you say the words of prayer naturally, allow your heart to hear His voice, so you can believe in miracles.]

[...This sounds like a terrible form of brainwashing.]

Let's try sorting out the situation. This bunch of evil fellows dumped me in this world. It is as good as abduction. Seeing that I did not give in, they decided to try a new approach. That is to let me use a cursed Operation Orb. The more I use it, the more it corrupts my soul? Go eat shit.

Not just that—the most terrible thing is, if I want to survive in this harsh war, even if the price is steep, it is very possible that I have no choice but to use it. I am already checkmated when they understood this.

Committing arson and then putting out the fire themselves. This is far worse than insider trading. If such barbaric means are allowed, it is as law and justice disappearing from civilization. Maybe I should act as the representative for the law and justice of humanity.

[We are not making this mandatory. This is just to let you experience the miracle of god, and pray to Him devoutly. The Operation Orb you possessed has already been blessed.]

What a way with words. Throwing me into a war environment where I might die at any moment, and say this is not mandatory? This is as good as dumping someone in the desert and asking him not to drink water. That's asking me to die. In a way this might even be intimidation.

[I see. By the way, what happened to my real body?]

[You are being protected by the grace of god. Go, set off on your journey. Spread the name of the Lord to the people.]

After saying these creepy words, my consciousness was pulled back to the “ground.”

I wasn't happy at all, since in front of my eyes was the face the human I didn't want to see the most, and his voice. If I was an officer in the Imperial Justice Department, I would sentence this lunatic to be executed by a firing squad. I am very certain right now, this is for the good of the Empire and performing my duty and obligation.

[The Lord descended among us! It is a miracle! Blessings will be granted to those who believe!]

That madman had dangerous eyes that seemed to scream “I am the new prophet.” No, he might really believe that he was really a prophet.

[Director, calm down.]

Please shut up. No need to boast with your entire body about the fact that a mad scientist can change jobs to “religious fanatic.” Please, disappear from my sight.

[Ohh, Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff. The experiment is a success! Let us give praise to the name of god together!]

But the sad thing was he was a mad fanatic, and still a madman like before. He was so obsessive with his religion that his brain went bonkers.

[Come, come, let me witness the miracle He bestowed!]

[Degurechaff to control, is the Type 95's control spell functioning normally?]

I hope they could stop the experiment because of technical issues. However, this was a curse laid by those that had powers beyond the realm of reality. My wish was easily shattered. It showed just how powerless mankind really were.

[It appears normal so far. But it might be the observational apparatus malfunctioning.]

[That might be possible. There's no other way. Seal the Type 95, and inspect it back in the lab.]

That is wonderful. Being meticulous is an indispensable quality for technicians. It is hard for me to forgive them for not saving me and evacuating, but I am fine with what they did right now. I can accept it if I think they did so in order to survive and stop the experiment.

[What are you saying?! Lieutenant, activate it right now!]

Someone seemed to be protesting. That damn maniac, isn't he afraid of being shot on accident by friendly fire one day?

No, he must have experienced that several times; shouldn't he be dead by now? It might sound implausible, but is he a minion of Existence X and his gang? I already knew he was my enemy, but are we sworn enemies on top of that?

[...Activated. Theoretically, it will either work or blow the entire facility along with us away.]

[It's hard to laugh at your joke, Lieutenant.]

I wasn't joking at all. I was serious. Forget it. Since it is a curse, obviously nothing good will come of it. Mana flew through the circuitry of the Operation Orb, and began quad core synchronization.

The Mana flow is very smooth, and the core synchronization is so smooth that it doesn't require any effort from me to operate. The Mana consumption is undoubtedly the same as the theoretical value.

I see, judging just from its performance, this is very powerful. Enough to earn rave reviews as the perfect invention. But regrettably, this thing is cursed.

[Ohh, the miracle of the lord almighty. Praise the Lord. Praise His glorious name.]

I shouted emotional words. At this instant, all the cells in my body couldn't resist the urge to praise the name of the Lord.

[It worked? ...No way, it really worked!]

I only returned to my senses after the observation team fell into the spiral of shock and shouted in surprise.

[...What did I just do?]

What was I thinking just then? What did I say? Did I praise something? I actually praise that fellow?!

[Yes, Lieutenant. It seems like you were finally able to understand the powers of faith. It really is a miracle.]

[A miracle?]

[Praise the glory of the Lord. Bear witness to this miracle.]

Everything so far had been a nightmare. After being cursed and experiencing a rather unpleasant situation, I am finally...finally free. And just need collate a bit

more data. As long as it isn't here, I don't mind going anywhere, I just want to get away.

As if to realize my wish, the Republic to the west went as far as to declare war on us. The notice I have been looking forward to came to me just when I was feeling despair for the world, bringing salvation to my psyche.

But in the end, it is far too difficult to have an easy life.

[chapter]

III

第参章

ラインの護り

The Watch/Guard On The Rhine



CHAPTER 3

The Watch Guard on the Rhine

Rhine Battlefront

In the skies above the Rhine battlefront, Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff was mixed among the chorus of mages currently taking flight. However, the difference between them was that she was ordered to fly alone.

Why?

Because the higher-ups were idiots.

That's why she was flying in the frontlines like this.

All for just very vague reasons which could be summarized in roughly three lines. Although from the perspective of the Empire, the situation at hand would be considered as an unexpected development, but for the ones that were being deployed onto the battlefield, this was definitely not something which could be dismissed simply by saying it was just an unexpected development.

If she learned anything during her deployment in the northern front, it was that there were no places to take cover in the sky. Apart from clouds, nothing else could be utilized as a method of concealment. Fortunately, mages have a certain degree of resilience in terms of defence.

Although the defense of a mage could be considered as reasonably sturdy and difficult to break through, it was definitely not impenetrable. If asked whether she was willing to stand before sniper rifles which emphasized penetrating power, or machine guns of unspeakable caliber, the answer would without a doubt be, "No". On top of that, there were no military units that feared isolation more so than

images. Despite all that, the higher-ups still ordered Tanya to fly alone in order to buy time for tactical reasons.

How could a mere Second Lieutenant refuse? Like a salaryman, she could only follow the rules of her employment. The thing which made her want to cry the most was that no noble concept of a right to refuse existed in the military, and the effort she had put into developing her skills in aerial combat had even earned her an Air Combat Technician badge in OCS. At this point, it would be useless for her to cry and say she couldn't fly.

And so, no matter how unwilling Tanya was, she still had to perform an emergency scramble to lead the way for the ground forces. The mission given was to act as a scout for the air security personnel and defensive frontlines. The call sign assigned to her by the western forces command post was "Hawkeye". She preferred this much better than "Fairy".

"Hawkeye 03 to Command Post, please respond."

Her temporary air security call sign was Hawkeye 03. Her task was to keep her eyes wide, look out for signs of enemy ahead, and report if she detected any hostile force. She would then maintain her distance from the approaching enemy and continue to gather intelligence while engaging them. Depending on the situation, she would need to take on the role of aerial guidance for the advancement of her allies while directly covering for them.

Regrettably, the designated air control officer was captured before he could begin guiding the troops, which made this job difficult beyond expectation.

"... Hawkeye 03 to Command Post, please respond."

Taking into consideration that the unit had been attacked and radio communications had fallen into chaos, Tanya luckily managed to contact the ground control officer after a repeated number of impatient calls.

“This is the temporary 7th Field Command. Call sign, Lazard 08. Reception is poor but working. Hawkeye 03, please proceed.”

As a matter of fact, an aerial mage with the role of air control and security was essentially just a pair of eyes in the sky, a role in which all enemy units aiming for the ground forces that the pair of eyes is responsible for would designate as their priority target number one. It was the same situation as the one she experienced in Norden. For an army that was unable to maintain neither its air nor magic zone superiority, losing such a mage would be the equivalent of losing their vision, yet despite of this, no one seemed to be aware of just how vulnerable a solitary mage was at being preyed on by the enemy.

There was nothing to be gained if they were left alone, so battle plans would always prioritize taking out such units.

“Lazard 08, acknowledged. I am receiving you clearly. Commencing support operation.”

“Thank you, Hawkeye 03. We are just in need of a pair of eyes. We warmly welcome you!”

However, a newly emergent situation meant she had to pour a bucket of cold water over her allies who were exuberant that they were receiving effective air support.

“Hawkeye 03 to Lazard 08. This might be sudden, but please give up on relying on my support. I have spotted a large number of units to my front.”

In the eyes of a solo mage targeted by the enemy, this couldn't be helped. If they were attacked the moment they reached their destination, defending themselves took priority over providing intelligence to allies.

Tanya had no intention of displaying her self-sacrifice or taking unnecessary risks. She maintained the highest level of alertness to keep herself safe. No matter what, since she was flying alone, Tanya had to flee the moment she was detected.

Consequently, even though it wasn't her intention to draw attention, she still used the full potential of the battle-ready Type 95 Operation Orb and increased her speed. Pushing her speed and altitude to the limit, Tanya performed an emergency climb to an altitude that would allow her to escape before the enemy drew near. She accounted for the possibility of anti-air fire and formed a protective membrane immediately beneath her which should be able to withstand a single hit.

The altitude she chose in order to survive was 8000 feet. With the protection of the "Lord," the Type 95 made various capabilities possible and achieved new limits for the maximum altitude during live combat exercises. According to that madman, this was the fruit borne from the miraculous collaboration between god and men. However, the process that achieved this revolutionary technology was deeply unpleasant for *a certain individual*. Worst of all, not only was this device cursed, Tanya was the only one who could use it; thus she couldn't escape her position as its dedicated testing personnel.

From a different angle, one might describe this as a "protection" or a "blessing", but for Tanya, she was far from willing to give it such credit. It was because of a reason she did not wish to talk about.

In a manga I read in the past, a member of an infamous crime syndicate said that a secret makes a woman more beautiful, but that is definitely a lie. After all, the more you use this orb, the deeper that "faith" is engraved into your psyche. I was changed in such a way that I will praise the lord, and I long for my heart to be free again.

Nevermind. Instead of worrying about that, I should take care of the job before me. Improvisation is fine too. This is what it means to lose your freedom of mind under the pressures of reality.

"Three o'clock, mages roughly the size of a squadron are coming in fast."

As she increased her altitude, Tanya used the opportunity to report all that she saw to the ground control officer. She grit her teeth, cursing the incompetency of the Imperial military brass in her heart.

The only reason as to why Tanya was currently targeted by the enemy was because the higher-ups had neglected the possibility that the Francois Republic would actually launch a surprise attack; just how could they make such a terrible blunder? Their most egregious mistake was the concentration of the Imperial forces as they tried to stay true to the theory of pursuit battles and attempted to maximize military gains, hoping that they could quickly trample the forces of the Federation. They even had the delusion of annexing the Federation.

Thanks to this, our own territory was only lightly guarded, a foolish move that invited the West to invade. What a tasteless a joke.

According to the national defence strategy of the Empire, the northern forces could easily maintain the battlefield by stalling the enemy. The strategic objective of the northern defenses was to support the eastern forces responsible for the northeastern border against its possible aggressor, the Union. As expected, since the force prioritized defence, it was hard to ask for a “complete” victory by just providing partial reinforcements.

In order to execute the large scale invasion campaign that they never expected to happen, Military Headquarters attempted to mobilize their reserve forces on a grand scale to finish off the Federation once and for all.

However, the mobilization led to a rapid change in the situation. “The art of war is of vital importance to the state”¹; planning the military operation of a country requires caution, but the Empire had carelessly mobilized its forces. It most certainly might not have been part of the plan, but this action had already agitated the neighbouring countries.

Just as the Empire had planned on finishing off the Federation in an “all out strike” with the intent of securing a better position for future defenses, the Francois

¹ The quote is from Sun Tzu: the art of war

Republic decided to take advantage of weakness in the Empire's defences and similarly launched an "all out strike" for their own benefit. *And the higher ups who created this foolish situation couldn't do anything but to say that this was unexpected.*

For the Empire, this mobilization was targeted at the Federation to resolve matters between the two countries. However for the neighbouring nations that were growing wary of the Empire's increasing military power, the possibility that the containment net keeping the Empire in check being broken frightened them.

The Francois Republic to the west was even more concerned due to several skirmishes with the Empire in recent years due to territorial disputes. With such a history between them, there was no way they would turn a blind eye to the Empire's actions.

Feeling the chains that had long been restraining the Empire finally beginning to loosen, in order to completely break free, the owner was forced to take a trip away from home. For the Francois Republic which was under constant pressure due to an inferior military strength, this was an opportunity they couldn't afford to miss.

Ironically, unlike the Empire which had an intense debate over whether or not they should break through the military deadlock that was in place, the Francois Republic had no choice but to launch an attack in order to safeguard the effectiveness of their own set military strategy.

"Also, I have confirmed a battalion-scale ground unit at one o'clock. On top of that, multiple unidentified aircraft are approaching fast."

This led to Tanya to having no choice but to take to the sky, and an operation orb she didn't want was shoved into her hands before she was thrown towards the enemy mages that were now swarming her.

"Lazard 08 acknowledge. We will take evasive action."

Be it the Empire or Francois Republic, both parties knew each other's capabilities to a certain extent. Of course, the Francois Republic knew the Empire's internal mobilization strategy and the resulting stalemate because of the containment net.

Practically speaking, the Francois Republic's defence strategy was focused on how to break through the internal mobilization strategy of their potential enemy, the Empire.

Their answer was simple: after the Empire finished its large scale mobilization, they would send their standing forces to attack bases in the Empire's west in order to suppress and grind away the Empire's war potential. Making their move when the Empire invaded some other nation was part of their overall war strategy, a situation they considered and prepared for.

No, strictly speaking, the position of the Republic gave them *no choice* but to plan their actions based on the premise that the Empire had already made their move. If they ignored the situation, it would be very likely that they would eventually have to face an Empire that had been liberated of the pressure from their northeast border. Hence, they had to act while they still had the upper hand *right now*.

I see, purely from a historical perspective, the northeast front could be decided in just one go. It would only take an instant. Going by the civilian view, even amateurs knew that the war would end very soon.

The Federation would be powerless to resist and would inevitably surrender to the Empire. This cold analysis was undoubtedly a realistic possibility in the future, but for the experts it was slightly different. It was true that destroying a country in just a few months would be quite rapid, but on a strategic level, tying down a nation's main forces in one place for several months would be too long.

The standing army would only need a few weeks to finish mobilization and launch their campaign with ample force. With this situation in mind, launching their attack was a tempting option for the Francois Republic. Just like the Empire's firm belief that their actions would break the chains of the northern front for all these years,

the Francois Republic also believed that this move would resolve the national security threat plaguing their homeland.

The priority was the achievement of victory in the northern theater. In other words, the higher-ups stressed that this was a strategic level decision... That's how it was. They were either too stupid to think of this possibility, or they thought about it but underestimated the gravity of the situation.

In the end, they were much too hasty when it came to directing a war. "A brilliant strategy for the Empire to avoid fighting on multiple fronts, and the sound of the artillery will soon herald the arrival of a new world order!" Such foolish propaganda had been broadcast repeatedly after the initial victory in the northern war zone arbitrarily stopped when the Francois Republic mercilessly launched their surprise attack. However for the people in the frontlines, the only use the propaganda had was to be the butt of jokes for a method to pass the time by mocking the foolishness of the higher-ups. At most, it made them want to scream that if the military brass were able to spare the effort to send over such useless propaganda to the frontlines, they should hurry up and send more men and resources over.

Instead of righteousness and ideology, it would be troublesome if they didn't deal with the reality before them.

"The vanguard of the enemy mage squadrons have already spotted me, and is approaching fast."

Reality was cruel and simple. The troops stationed at the Western Front were forced to be a punching bag that was unable to strike back until the main forces returned from the north. Even the Training Department had to dispatch their prototypical units onto the frontlines under the pretext of it being part of a live combat evaluation, which was definitely a sign that suggested the Empire has been pushed to its limits.

For the experimental and research-oriented troops of the Training Department to have been committed to the frontlines, such a move was usually only done when a

country was just steps away from destruction. Of course, these units all possessed a certain amount of training and could be utilized for emergencies, which was why Tanya, who was supposed to remain behind in the laboratories of the homeland, ended up in the frontlines due to her nation's panic when faced with the current unexpected development on the western front.

“Lazard 08 to Hawkeye 03. We will send support immediately.”

“Hawkeye 03 to Lazard 08. I won't be expecting much, but thank you for your help.”

Tanya responded back and began to exit the battle zone at the same time. She was permitted to retreat at her own discretion this time, so she might as well make the most out of it.

“I will be leaving this airspace.”

“Hawkeye 03, best of luck!”

On the battlefield, support from allies might be your only hope. Yet in actual fact, reinforcements arriving in time was a rare occurrence, as Tanya knew very well from history and her past experience. Holding expectations for unreliable reinforcements and betting one's life on optimistic speculations were examples of foolishness; that was why she decided to focus on making a retreat.

“Hawkeye 03, acknowledged.”

Considering the cards she had on hand, Tanya could not help but to turn melancholic. However, on her vexed and bitter face was the awareness that she still had to face reality. Her blue eyes, that were like a philosopher craving for the wisdom of mankind, showed anxiety and annoyance; a small child-like groan could be heard escaping from her petite mouth, it was the display of wrath over the current unreasonable situation.

“... Ugh...”

However, the worries of Tanya Degurechaff were very simple. It was the anger of forcing her to perform a task which was above that of her pay grade, and the resentment over a black-hearted career that couldn't completely guarantee safety guidelines. This made her willing to accept the existence of labor unions and wished from the bottom of her heart for labour laws to be passed.

It could be said that this was a result of the dissatisfaction of an individual against the logically reasonable actions performed by the military. In order to relieve the fatigue of all aviation personnel so that they could maintain concentration during consecutive days of intense battle, the military would generously supply them with food containing high amounts of calories. In fact, having a high calorie diet was an obligation for the mages and pilots in the Imperial military.

But even so, when asked regarding the subject about the consumption of methamphetamine¹, things became slightly complicated for Tanya. However, the more pressing matter that she was hesitating at the moment was something far worse than any drug out there, given in the form of the collaboration between that madman and a certain Existence X, to which Tanya had already received instructions that she was to make use of it as her final trump card. *I really should have tossed it away long ago.*

That was just how unwilling she was about using the Type 95. From the bottom of her heart she did not wish to ever use the operation orb that had been blessed by the gods, but what if she ended up in a situation where she must rely on it in order to survive? It really was the most troublesome dilemma that Tanya had ever faced.

For the 228th Mage Recon Squadron of the Republic commanded by First Lieutenant Michel Housman, today should have been just like any other day. The

¹ The LN listed it as Philopon (ヒロポンhiropon), a Japanese brand of meth which was widely used by the pilots of the Axis military during WWII.

unit at the furthest forefront of the Francois Republic had successfully conducted a tactical surprise attack. For vanguards like them, even if the effect of the surprise attack was wearing off and their mission was relabelled as an assault, the essence remained the same.

Robbing the eyes of the Imperial army that was trying to recover from chaos on one end and cutting off their communications on the other. Isolating the enemy forces and stopping them from building an organized line of defence, and assisting the troops that would be following to widen the breach. It was the same charge this group of veterans led by First Lieutenant Housman had received a few days ago.

However, on the actual battlefield, there was no foreshadowing of things like in the novels or the movies. Not for any given situation.

“Golf 01 to CP (Command Post). Encountered enemy sentry.”

“CP, acknowledged. We believe it is a lookout posted by nearby combatants. Eliminate them immediately, and continue searching for the location of the main enemy force.”

An unlucky fellow. That was the impression First Lieutenant Housman had. After all, that mage was being chased by a squadron of mages, and on top of that, it was his squadron, the vanguard of the entire army. The difference in strength was obvious. *That was why the enemy mage chose to flee when he caught sight of us.*

Based on the way the enemy had responded, Housman immediately understood that the opponent was highly skilled and capable of making quick decisions. After all, he had already climbed to an impractical altitude of 8000 feet. That was the reason why Michel thought the mage was unlucky. No matter how much skill one possesses, unlucky soldiers never live long.

“Golf 01, acknowledged. But an altitude of 8000 feet, what a desperate height...”

Even though the opponent seemed to be well aware of the difficulties involved in maintaining such altitude for long periods of time, but in order to escape, there was no other choice. Housman too was well aware of this fact. The only available options was to either flee to a place where the enemy would be hesitant to follow, or to fly at a low altitude and leave the rest to fate.

Normally, for units engaged in long-distance attack expeditions, they had a tendency of avoiding situations such as requiring to climb to an altitude of 8000 feet in order to conserve their energy. The opponent had the right mindset.

“However, the phrase, ‘It’s too high to reach!’ is only reserved for children. Brothers, let us begin our work in a gentlemanly fashion!”

Not allowing any enemy mages they encountered to escape so easily, for Housman, there was no room for discussion when considering the content of his mission.

“You all heard that? Good, Flight Mike will eliminate the sentry. Everyone else follow me to conduct force recon. We will then break through the enemy defence line.”

With the defence line of the Empire still in a very much weakened state, the situation at hand was greatly in favor of the Republic to win. This was the principle to which everyone involved in the operation believed in, regardless of whether they were a general or a private. They mustn’t allow the temporary defence line to stall their own advance which could lead to the main enemy forces returning on time to defend.

That was the reason the reconnaissance mage units were expected to further disrupt the enemy defence line by performing force recon, which was to offensively engage the enemy defence line to collect intelligence. If they succeeded in disrupting the line, gaps in the enemy would appear. Aware that the responsibility of leading the Republic to victory relied on their soldiers, they bore the resolve to never retreat.

“Acknowledged, I will catch up in a while.”

After the flight leader had said this, Mike’s Flight climbed rapidly in pursuit. Naturally, even for the elites of the Republic, it was difficult for them to overcome the issues experienced at an altitude of 8000 feet. Typically speaking, the standard altitude for combat was 4000 feet. 6000 feet was considered as the limit for aerial mages.

In this sense, the enemy was quite smart in choosing the altitude of 8000 feet. In actual fact, this pursuit would probably drain the combat potential of Mike’s flight, reducing the overall combat strength of the recon squadron into two flights. From the perspective of acting as decoy and dragging out the battle, the sentry contributed wonderfully. *We are fighting an opponent that is worthy of our respect.*

“Engage. Fox One, Fox One¹!”

First Lieutenant Housman who was lost in thoughts suddenly had his focus broken by the radio message. Fulfilling his responsibility as a squadron leader, he listened to his subordinate announcing the firing of long-ranged spell missiles. At the same time, the enemy soldier before them made a new move. He probably realized there was no escape. The enemy turned abruptly and charged towards Mike’s flight as if he was hunting them. It appears that he was taking the offensive.

“Fox Two, Fox Two! Impossible—he dodged that!”

¹ **Fox** is a brevity code used by NATO pilots to signal the simulated or actual release of an air-to-air munition or other combat function.

- **Fox One** - Indicates launch of a semi-active radar-guided missile.
- **Fox Two** - Indicates launch of an infrared-guided missile.
- **Fox Three** - Indicates launch of an active radar-guided missile.
- **Fox Four** - Historical term indicating air-to-air or air-to-surface cannon fire. The term in current usage is *Guns, Guns, Guns*.

The confused voice that was conveyed through the radio contained a mixture of emotions such as confusion and surprise that he was being counter attacked, as well as the shock that his attack was being evaded. In a blink of an eye, the distance between Mike's Flight and the enemy mage had shortened considerably all the while as they speculated the enemy's intentions.

It was rather far away, but when Housman had sensed that Mike's Flight was starting to get serious, he was certain they could handle the situation. Was the enemy trying to stall for more time through close quarters engagement? For a tactic that was adopted on the fly, this wasn't a bad choice. However, the opponent was not a Squadron, but a Flight. The teamwork that was possible in a Flight made harassment tactics difficult, and the combat disparity was despairingly high for a lone mage to take on. He respected the courage and determination of the opponent, but this was a foolhardy move.

"Enemy charging! Scatter! Scatter!"

At the same moment, Mike's Flight had spread out, changing their formation to counter melee combat. Their goal was to eliminate the eyes of the enemy and support their own follow-up attacks. The opponent they were engaging might not know yet, but the mission of the reconnaissance squadron was completed the moment he was spotted. If the enemy's "eyes" were to be taken out, there would be nothing else to worry about even if they were stalled for a short while.

"Three-burst crossfire! Prepare your spells! Firing, Fox Three! Fox Three!"

Deliberately keeping some distance away to intercept the enemy's attack while maintaining their crossfire zone, the teamwork and skill of Housman's subordinates were as good as the ideal textbook level. The enemy mage had entered the firing line of bullets infused with magic. Even if the opponent had the advantage in speed, it would not be difficult to score a hit for the waiting defenders.

But what happened next was beyond the expectation of First Lieutenant Housman and his men. The enemy definitely suffered a direct hit. The volley fire shot via the

method of Regulated Shooting which contained military-grade explosive spells that could easily dissipate a mage's protective membrane and even pierce through tough outer protection barrier had hit the target straight on.

“Fox Three! Fox Three! Damn it! Why is he so tough?!”

The moment multiple bullets with embedded spells activated, the enemy mage was engulfed in flames. Even though this happened—

“That thing” continued to advance unabated, as if it was flying in a deserted air space, closing the distance fearlessly. By instinct rather by logic they realized the current situation had progressed to a point beyond terrible. However, humans as a whole had already lost their primal senses with the advent of civilization.

“Mike 03! Check Six! Check Six!¹ Ahh, damn it!”

In a blink of an eye, “that thing” dashed into the arms of his subordinate and a mage bayonet had ominously sprouted from behind his chest. Followed after was the motion of blade swing which had cleanly cut him apart from torso to torso, almost as if the actions of cutting food apart on the dinner plate.

“Pan-pan, Pan-pan, Pan-pan!²”

“What is that!? What is that! That bastard! Damn it, Fox Four!”

A series of complex radio messages was exchanged. What was that? What the hell was that? Through the lens of his binoculars, Housman focused his eyes on the

¹ **Check Six**, Visual observation of the rear quadrant, from which most air-to-air attacks can be expected. Refers to the clock system of scanning the envelope around the aircraft; 12 o'clock is straight ahead, 6 o'clock is directly astern. Also a common salutation and greeting among tactical pilots. Keep an eye on your behind, be careful.

² Three calls of **pan-pan** are used in radiotelephone communications to signify that there is an urgency on board a boat, ship, aircraft, or other vehicle but that, for the time being at least, there is no immediate danger to anyone's life or to the vessel itself.

scene unfolding before him. The terrible sight made him doubt his eyes. In terms of aerial maneuvering, Mike's Flight was the best in the Squadron. They were being toyed with? ... "Impossible—" he mumbled unconsciously. *Can a mage really be capable of... doing this?*

"Mike One? Mike One?"

When Housman came to his senses, Mike's Flight was akin to being paralyzed from the waist down. Mike 01 and Mike 03 were downed, the receiver from Mike 04's operation orb was probably hit, and he was losing altitude fast. Mike 02 was barely hanging on while covering for Mike 04, and wouldn't last long either.

"Damn it, Flight Bravo, Flight Golf, turn back! Turn back! We are covering Flight Mike."

There was no way First Lieutenant Housman could ignore the plight of his subordinates. He hastily ordered the flights under his command to turn back and cover Flight Mike at full speed.

But the question, "How?" remained in his heart. The abilities of mages might differ from individual to individual, but could a mage be *that* good? According to rumours, some of the magicians from the Empire possessed specially calibrated operation orbs, and used the large amount of mana they were born with to arm themselves.

Even so, they could match a two-man team at most. Even those Named¹-level monsters were mostly fellows that utilized hit and run tactics. In a battle between mages, it was unbelievable for someone to fight an entire Flight head on, instead of taking out mages one at a time.

"The enemy is within range!"

¹ The LN calls it (ネームド "Named"), like a noun, eg. "enemy Named spotted". It sounds slightly strange in English but we decided to follow through with it. Just think of it as referring to "Named Ones" or "Named Pilots" when our text simply says "Named".

However, as the squadron captain, Housman didn't have time to worry about it. *The Bandit is within shooting range. Wipe away all the distractions from my mind, and give the instruction to snipe from long distance in flight formation. It is a bit far, but it is impossible for the Regulated Shooting from two flights to miss.*

The opponent must have realized this too. Adhering to textbook air combat theory, he began taking evasive maneuvers. Everything until this point was acceptable...but the question was, how was he darting around so deftly, as if gravity wasn't applicable to him?

“Fox One! Fox One!”

And the most unbelievable thing was—no, the nightmarish thing was the toughness of the opponent's protective membrane. Even though long distance attacks primarily emphasized on accuracy, there was still an explosion spell mixed in with the homing spell. Even if he dodged all the attacks, there was no way he could avoid the explosion that covered the entire sky.

But the enemy wasn't fazed and started counterattacking, making one wonder whether this was a joke.

“I'm charging! Cover me!”

Golf 02 probably thought it would be useless to carry on shooting. He drew his close quarters magic bayonet and charged with a roar. That was the right judgement. No matter how tough one's defence was, it would be impossible to remain unscathed after suffering a hit from a magic bayonet at close distance. Since long range shooting couldn't finish off the enemy, focusing fire was also a reasonable strategy.

“Got it! Fox Two, Fox Two!”

In response to his charge, the entire flight advanced into mid range, knowing that it would be difficult to evade at such a distance. It was a skillful display of simultaneous volley fire, the tradition of the Republic, famed among nations as the “Named Killers.” With six sniping spells and one explosion spell used in place of a smoke grenade, their supporting fire hit the enemy mage directly... That is what should have happened.

“He’s still there? How is that possible!?”

“Golf 02, break! Break!”

Despite suffering the blanketing mid-range fire, the enemy mage was still alive. He could still fly after eating sniping spells that could pierce half-baked protection barriers? Even though they witnessed such an absurd scene, they didn’t have time to think about the question.

As for Golf 02, who tried to attack from close range, he barely managed to escape because of the covering fire of Mike 02. On top of that, the shots from the enemy mage shredded the protection membrane of their allies as if it was nothing, taking out two members in no time.

“We were tricked! Damn bastard!”

No matter how unwilling Housman was, he still understood that he had been had.

The evasive actions and climbing to 8000 feet was a scam. A move to split our forces. It was common sense that combat maneuvers were impossible at 8000 feet...but that has been turned on its head. He played us like a damn fiddle, I made such a stupid mistake and my subordinates are being taken out one by one. Biting his lower lip, First Lieutenant Housman find it hard to swallow the rage of his subordinates being hurt, but he understood the situation he was in. They encountered a monster—an unknown Named.

“Mayday, Mayday, Mayday! We have encountered a new type of enemy mage!”

“Damn it! And they claimed it would be an easy victory! Golf 01 to CP, emergency report! We have encountered an unknown Named, please permit us to RTB (Return to Base) and send reinforcements.”

Imperial Technology Research Laboratory Investigation Committee

Just utilizing the latest technology wasn't good enough for a new type of weapon. The production cost, maintainability, and operative efficiency are all elements that dictated the value of new weapons. On the other hand, there were many elements that could only be evaluated after using it in a live situation on the frontlines.

It might be the worst news for the Military Headquarters, but the war which had broken out on the western borders with the Francois Republic was the perfect opportunity for the Type 95 Development Team to conduct their live battle experiment. With the entire research team mobilized, they hoped the Type 95 could be proven to be combat-ready in the battle. However, the results had exceeded their expectations in a spectacular manner.

“How was the battle?”

“Exceptional. Downed six, damaged three, three missing in action. According to the surveillance report, it was unlikely that the three that went missing will return to their base.”

It was acceptable even if the experiment ended in failure; it was a weapon that was completed through a miraculous experiment after all. However the experimental usage yielded amazing results. The accomplishment of the Type 95 was enough to earn the delighted personnel involved in the research plenty of acclamations.

And of course, the skill of the user played a major role. Second Lieutenant Degurechaff's skill was indeed worthy of being awarded the Silver Wing Assault medal. Yet that wasn't enough to display such a disparity in fighting prowess and obtain such excellent results.

“She literally took out an entire squadron by herself.”

She didn't down all the mages, but still fended off one whole squadron. This could only mean she had an overwhelming advantage in terms of quality. It was hard proof that the theoretical values had been shown to be possible in a practical settings.

“Yes, to think it would reach such a level.”

Judging by common sense, this was an unbelievable result. Aside from revolutionary, there was no other words that could describe this. With this new technology, battle on a different level had made its debut.

“That's right. Judging from the Elin Laboratory's results, I thought it was a terribly flawed device.”

The general officers who once doubted the practicality of continuing research lamented. After opening the cover of the after action report to check on the things that he had been worried about, only to find extraordinary results that wiped away all the failures so far in one shot. Since such a result was achieved, all the things that happened in the past were worth it. Even the cost could be minimized through mass production.

“No, the device is flawed.”

Yet a cold bucket of water was thrown in response to the compliment that was filled with admiration. The research department was well aware of the thought processes behind those from the operation side. A revolutionary technology, and hopes for a revolutionary improvement in quality. If the research department had to comment, they would tell you that was unfortunately a fantasy.

Since it was just a fantasy, they had to wake them up from it early.

“What do you mean? From the battle results, it was beyond our expectations.”

“That’s true. This is a product that can change the face of mage battles.”

The Type 95 had indeed achieved fantastic results. It was a fact. The performance was also vastly better than the current generation, calling it a next, next generation product would not be an exaggeration. The quad-core synchronization structure made the stabilization of mana in its physical form possible, allowing one to store and use it in live combat. The technology to turn this fantasy into reality made the operations officers drool.

After all, the technology to stabilize mana in a physical form like bullets provided limitless tactical potential. Using stored mana to fight meant the normal mana limitations had been removed.

“All the worries and critique raised in the past have been refuted in live battle. That’s how I understand this.”

This was the mutter of a certain general-rank staff officer. In reality, the facts trumped any debate. The synchronized quad-core made quadruple output a reality, raising combat prowess to a brand new realm. After learning the technology could work, the operation side craved to have it.

“There is only one successful case. Aside from the goal of testing this technology, the project was a complete failure.”

Nonetheless, from the perspective of the researchers, they didn’t commit the Type 95 into live combat in order to promote its technology. From the current situation, they wanted to find out where problems were, and so they pushed for its deployment when war broke out in the west. Putting the scientific studies aside, there was never any consideration of mass producing it.

“What happened to the other cases?”

The most successful case was also the *only* successful case after all. If they didn't have any idea how to manufacture it normally, it would be doubtful if they could even make another one. For a technology specific to users that were difficult to find, having just one person who could use the Orb successfully made it impossible to mass produce this weapon.

“In one of the worst cases, the entire laboratory exploded, and an entire team was lost.”

It had a tendency to explode after all; something that will disintegrate on itself if the circuit was not perfect. If the Orb was successfully covered just once, it could be used freely in the future; this had been proven to work in live combat. Still, the success rate of the critical covering was despairingly low.

The worst case was after the failure to synchronize, quadruple the amount of mana exploded, blowing the team performing the test into dust. These included the trainers dispatched by the Training Department from central, and elites from the advanced technology testing team.

“...But, this can enhance magic powers right? It has a charm that makes it hard to let go.”

“The only one who can use it properly is Second Lieutenant Degurechaff. The best the other testing personnels could do is to not get blown up.”

As the developers and as researchers, they had to give a stern warning because of their ethics. The researchers who pushed for research to continue placed their efforts only on revolutionizing the scientific aspect, pursuing “the limit of what they could currently achieve,” but after thinking it through calmly, they are the ones who best understood the danger and difficulty of this new technology.

They had to understand this point.

“Isn't there a successful case? Why don't you just recreate that situation?”

“...Elin Laboratory almost disappeared. For the successful case of Second Lieutenant Degurechaff, even though I shouldn't be saying this as a researcher, was the result of incredible coincidence.”

The level of danger in stabilizing mana in physical form through synchronizing quad cores was much higher than predicted. This was proven by analyzing the observed results after the experiment. The test succeeded miraculously, but if it failed, judging from the amount of mana that was measured, the entire Elin Laboratory would have been turned to ashes. Going by rational decision-making, they couldn't afford to carry out another experiment as any failure would be devastating.

“You mentioned coincidence?”

“The instant when the mana went out of control and the core was about to break apart, the interference wave just happened to be in sync, and the core barely managed to be synchronized right before it fell apart.”

For the researchers, it was a mind blowing result, but they succeeded in the end in a baffling manner. They only knew that the out of control mana just happened to fuse together. Even if they wanted to test it one step further, in the end, they could only say that it was a coincidence.

If one really wanted to push it, it might be possible to recreate this situation by letting the mana go out of control and adjusting it skillfully...but such a conclusion was useless. This wasn't a result that could be recreated normally. This was like seeing a lightning strike that just happened to carve out a masterpiece sculpture, and trying to recreate it manually by hand.

“Hence, the out of control mana triggered the phenomenon of the mana stabilizing in physical form. Simply put, this is a miraculous coincidence.”

Even on the experimental report, Engineering Director Schugel also noted that “success was only possible through the act of god,” which showed just how miraculous it was. An event that was nigh impossible. A coincidence that happened which was beyond the understanding of mankind.

Even Engineering Director Schugel who completed the Type 95 gave up on developing it. He expressed the conclusion that “Continuing would be a sacrilege on this miracle, an arrogant move that disrespects god.” Even this through-and-through scientific expert concluded that “only the one chosen by god can use this tool,” which went to show how difficult it was.

“Which means?”

“Something baffling happened in a baffling condition, and it is being used right now. That is the current situation.”

Anyway, that was what they knew. Be it the principle behind it, or recreating it again, would require huge amount of time and effort. And no matter how they calculated the probability, the numbers were not worth betting on.

“Might as well hail Second Lieutenant Degurechaff as a hero, that might be a better deal.”

“...I agree. This will yield greater benefits.”

Fortunately, Second Lieutenant Degurechaff was quite young—to put it simply, she was a talent who received the Silver Wing Assault medal at such a tender age. Complimenting her capabilities would make things easier for political propaganda.

Cadet Corps Dormitory

I, Victoria Ivanovna Serbiakof am a early riser.

“Visha! Rise and shine, Visha!”

“Uuughhhh, morning, Erya.”

Truthfully speaking this is because my beautiful friend will always wake me up; that’s why I could maintain my early-rising lifestyle. Not only was the kind-hearted Erya taller than me, she had a great figure with all the right curves despite being slender. Although she had such a great figure, she didn’t suffer from low blood pressure in the morning, and had a considerate personality.

I was shorter than her by just one centimeter and was thin too, but the heavens were really unfair. Erya had the same lifestyle as me, but her growth in specific parts of the body differed so much from me, which was hard to accept.

No matter who it was, after enrolling in the Cadet Corp, they would want to sleep for longer inside their warm beds. Chatting all night long with friends from the dormitory was one of the few pleasures we could indulge in after all. Erya really loves chatting through the night. Most of the time, I would retire to bed earlier than her.

Despite that, she always gets up earlier than me, that’s just plain unreasonable. This meant that no matter how much effort I put in, the difference between individuals are simply difficult to overcome.

I might be saying that, but I don’t hate this kind friend of mine.

Even if one doesn’t wish to, those who had the potential to be mages would be drafted forcefully, and dumped into the Cadet Corp to receive training. Forced to live a stringent and disciplined lifestyle, filled with the unending lectures of demonic drill instructors. The reason I wasn’t blaming god all the time was because of this wonderful acquaintance.

But my days together with this good friend of mine would probably end today. I didn’t feel this way all this while, but today, Erya and I will be assigned to a

combat unit. I hope we could be posted to the same unit, but I probably couldn't expect too much.

Instead of wearing uniforms, it was more like the uniforms wearing us, yet we were still real soldiers. Fate gave us the potential to be mages for unknown reasons.

And so, we became Imperial mages feared throughout the world. More accurately speaking, we were going to be rookies soon. Before I knew it, I became a reinforcement sent to the Rhine battlefield to the west and was dumped in the dormitory of the western army.

Due to my obligation as a soldier, I had to act as a shield for the beloved fatherland in the dangerous west, working diligently to secure the borders...or something like that. As a citizen of the almighty Empire, I did think about fighting for the glory of the country, but I always felt that I was too insignificant to matter. This couldn't be helped, after all, my birthplace was the beautiful Moscow that was white with snow. What I could recall from that time was vague, and there were remnants of unpleasant memories of widespread communism too. Thanks to that, I experienced life as a refugee with my parents as we journeyed to seek safety with our relatives. I was young back then, so those days were just a blurry past to me, but I still feel unqualified as an Imperial soldier.

But I am very grateful to my uncle and aunt who took me in. In second place was god who blessed me with food every day.

“Bon appetit.”

Unlike the meals in the rear, the NCO (Non Commissioned Officer) mess in the front mainly consisted of vegetables that weren't too fresh and canned food, and I have gotten used to them. Even the meal that tasted like a combat ration which made me cry a little when I reported to the unit on the first day seemed to taste better now.

“Are you listening, Visha? I heard the flight you are assigned to will be lead by a new flight leader.”

Meal time was the time when everyone gathered together to chat happily. And considering the time and place, the topic would always drift to our postings.

“Really? How is it possible to assign a new flight leader at a time like this?”

“It’s true!”

“Erya, calm down.”

However, most of them were baseless rumours. I once heard that the if you stay in a unit long enough, you would be able to find out about your posting, and even the posting of your colleagues, which sounded probable. But of course, even though we were NCOs, mages fresh from the Cadet Corp like us couldn’t even tell our own bearing in the army; seeking out such information would be impossible.

That might be so, but I was very concerned about my posting. Also my friend had a knack with odd pieces of news.

“But is it true? We are reinforcements, will they really let us form a new flight in the frontlines?”

“Visha, that might be so in theory, but I guarantee that this is true. After all, I heard the manpower officers say so with my own ears.”

Though the thing I was most concerned about was where did Erya hear all this news from? They weren’t grade school teachers; would manpower officers from the military discuss posting issues in the presence of others? ...I better not think too much.

“Erya...Sometimes I wonder if you are a ninja that came from the far east.”

“Hahaha. A woman has her secrets, comrade Victoria.”

“Alrighty. By the way, you know where this flight will be assigned to?”

“Ah, it’s not forming a new flight, but replacement in a flight that was wiped out... that’s basically it. Don’t worry, I heard the flight leader is a veteran soldier who possesses the Silver Wings medal.”

For a brief moment, I didn’t understand what I just heard. When I came to my senses, my idling brain reacted immediately due to shock.

“Silver Wings? ...You mean the Silver Wings Assault Medal!”

“Ohh, look how panicky you are.”

“Hmm?”

“Visha has an expressive face as usual.”

My friend controlled her volume expertly, laughing softly without drawing attention from the other people in the mess; I will thank her later. But to think someone could receive the Silver Wings Assault Medal alive... Rather than being an amazing imperial soldier, that was more like being an amazing human being.

“Oh right, you know about your own posting too, right?”

“That’s right. I will be a forward observation officer supporting the artillery. In charge of slacking off in the rear.”

“You... If you are careless, who knows what might happen.”

I might be saying that, but the news that my friend would be staying in a safe place made me so envious and relieved.

“Uh-oh, you are taking it too easy, meal time is almost over. Hurry up and eat, Visha.”

“Mhm, okay... eh, where did my caramel go?”

“Ohh, since you didn’t touch it, I helped you eat it.”

After all, this mischievous person who always makes me angry was my most important friend.

(Several days prior) Imperial Capital

“Reassignment?”

A reassignment notice given out by the Technology Research Department that made her the test personnel for the Type 95 and treated her like a guinea pig. Second Lieutenant Mage Tanya Degurechaff, who was longed for this day after spending each day as if it was a year, accepted the notice with a heart full of satisfaction. Finally... Her application was approved. Her psyche could be liberated. She couldn’t wait to head for her new posting immediately.

“It’s a reassignment alright. The higher-ups didn’t plan to let an Ace idle around. You will be assigned to the 205th assault mage squadron as the leader of flight number three.”

Considering the fact that the Training Department had to join the battle, it couldn’t be helped if her posting was to the frontlines. Or rather, a mage from OCS being

assigned to be a flight leader in the front lines was much better than being toyed with as a guinea pig in the lab.

She would finally have subordinates serving under her. She could now delegate the tasks that she had to handle alone in the past. Even if it left an unfavourable impression with the higher ups, in the worst case scenario, the subordinates could be used as human shields. Never mind, she wouldn't do that unless they were very incompetent. No matter what, this was something to be happy about.

“And congratulations, Second Lieutenant. According to your merits in the earlier battle, we have decided to award you with the Flying Assault medal, but this might pale in comparison compared to the Silver Wing,.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

Tanya even answered simply with a smile that befitted her age. She then returned to the dormitory in high spirits and packed her luggage quickly. Still, soldiers don't have many personal belongings anyway. Even though she was biologically a girl, Tanya feels that clothes just needed to be clean and neat. The clothes she owned were just uniforms. However, as all the standard sizes didn't fit her, she had no choice but to apply for a uniform allowance to have them made custom.

Even so, she didn't even need an hour to pack this much of her belongings into her officer luggage bag. She informed the head of the temporary dormitory about her reassignment and appointment letter, and thanked him for taking care of her for this period of time. Her paperwork was done.

After that, she immediately headed for her assigned unit. In the end, this was an assignment out in the frontlines, so she could save the hassle of social etiquette such as farewell parties, and she wanted to take up the post as soon as possible. Hence, after receiving permission to fly from the Air Defence Identification Zone¹,

¹ An **Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)** is airspace over land or water in which the identification, location, and control of civil aircraft is performed in the interest of national security. They may extend beyond a country's territory to give the country more time to respond to possibly hostile aircraft.

she immediately placed her packed luggage onto her back, and flew towards the assigned allied forces rendezvous point.

Fortunately, despite the war being waged, this was still movement between places in the rear lines. After completing the safe, short flight that took less than two hours, Tanya arrived at the base and presented herself before her squadron captain, reporting her assignment loudly:

“I am Second Lieutenant Mage Tanya Degurechaff, 3rd flight leader of the 205th assault mage squadron, reporting for duty.”

“Well met, Second Lieutenant. First, let me welcome you. I am the squadron captain, First Lieutenant Iren Schwarzkopf.”

As he faced the flight leader reporting duty with her assignment orders in hand, the squadron leader confirmed the document as he welcomed Tanya and completed the assignment orders. The two conversed as per military guideline about the business at hand also sized each other up with their eyes. After all, both of them were soldiers, and couldn't choose the person who would be fighting on their side. Since there wasn't a choice, they would like to know the character of the other person at the very least, or they wouldn't be able to survive in the battlefield. This was a logical conclusion.

“Yes, Squadron Captain Schwarzkopf. Pleased to meet you.”

“Very good. Let us get to the point, Lieutenant Degurechaff. How is your experience with leading a flight?”

The thing that made Tanya happy was that from a first impression, the commanding officer she was assigned under was an orthodox mage. A First Lieutenant squadron captain. From his age, he probably served in the military for many years. Other than that, she could deduce from the medals he was wearing that he had plenty of combat experience.

Especially the medals commemorating his participation in numeral small scale battles; they were proof of his abilities. So from the first impression, Tanya didn't need to worry about him being an incompetent superior that would be more frightening than the enemy. As she couldn't choose her commanding officer, if he was like the legendary fellow who caused the collapse of the Burma-Imphal battlefield, she would have no choice but to mourn her lack of luck.

"This is my first time after being commissioned."

First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf was also observing Second Lieutenant Degurechaff. He couldn't deny that he felt baffled when a child had brazenly walked to his desk in the Squadron Command office. The message from the higher-ups only mentioned about sending him a mage with combat experience in the northern frontlines, and had a stint in the Training Department in Central.

First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf had previously envisioned in his mind a hardened veteran who had started from the very bottom of the ladder and climbed up to where he was now. After all, it was the norm for one to think a Second Lieutenant from the Training Department would be someone who had experienced a fair amount of battle, and being the veteran he is, it would be good to rely on in many ways. On top of that, as the possessor of the Silver Wing Assault medal, it would definitely mean that he would be highly experienced and a capable soldier. That's why when he saw this brat who was younger than his daughter performing a crisp salute, he had second thoughts about leaving the most troublesome flight that only a veteran could handle into her hands.

"...Second Lieutenant, I will be frank."

If her resume wasn't forged and there wasn't any misunderstanding in between, the Second Lieutenant who was waiting for the First Lieutenant to speak was indeed an important asset who had achieved amazing merits and was sent by the higher-ups to the west in order to deal with the precarious western battlefield. However, being a great athlete was different from being a great coach, and the situation made him bear worries akin to that.

“According to regulations, our 205th Assault Mage squadron should have three flights, but actually, since the early days of the war, our numbers dwindled to below two flights, and there hasn’t been any replacement for the longest time.”

That’s why a new flight leader and members were assigned to the squadron. Realistically speaking, even if the entire flight was comprised of newly minted recruits, First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf knew he had no grounds to complain. Although that was why he hoped the flight leader in charge would be an experienced veteran.

“...Can you command a flight comprised of recruits from the Cadet Corps?”

Saying it in a brutally honest way, a flight leading rookies couldn’t contribute, and were just a burden. No, more than a burden. This was expected; they wouldn’t be having such a hard time if they could spare the effort to babysit kids while waging a war.

Depending on how the question was answered, he would decide if an immediate change in personnel was warranted. In response, Second Lieutenant Degurechaff simply answered:

“Please give me the orders to do so.”

She didn’t waste any breath, just a solemn tone of describing the truth. Despite that, her eyes that was looking back at Schwarzkopf was rebellious pride and frustration that her abilities was being questioned.

“And I will get it done.”

Her words also displayed her unwavering confidence. This answer was beyond his expectations. Since a combat veteran said, “Please give the orders”, he had to believe the orders would definitely be carried out; this was the first step of building trust.

“Alright, I have high expectations of you, possessor of the Silver Wing Assault medal.”

“Yes Sir!”

Mainly because she hailed from the Training Department and bore the Silver Wing Assault medal, she was worthy of this level of trust.

Tanya also realized that First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf only accepted her words because of the medal she was wearing. Which meant that the worth of Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff was just this medal.

From this alone, Tanya was very grateful for having received the Silver Wing Assault medal. However, she didn't wish to be regarded as just a complimentary item that came with the medal and hoped to cast aside the nickname of “Mithril” as soon as possible. Yet apart from causing Tanya to be unable to pass her SAN Checks, the current situation did not result in any real harm, and could be considered as something which brings a positive light to her overall evaluation.

Well, overall Tanya welcomed it. Under her soldierly expression, Tanya calculated her gains and losses. Receiving good will and praise was much better than hostility and insult.

“Very well. I will explain the situation.”

“Yes, please.”

And so, the two who judged each other positively decided to trust the other party for now, and focus on their own obligation and tasks. What will follow next would be time for work.

“As you already know, the main force of our nation is being mustered and organized right now.”

After the Empire was hit by the strategic sneak attack of the Francois Republic, they fell into confusion in the beginning, but judging from the first engagement, the Empire had mostly responded well, and was maintaining the front lines despite the lack of manpower. It didn't change the fact that they were being suppressed, but this was part of their national policy of the Internal Mobilization Strategy. Judging from this, even though the western forces received reinforcement from garrison units in central, they still fulfilled their defensive obligation.

“That might be so...but they would need some time before reaching the western front to reinforce us.”

There was only one problem. The reserves' forces and standing army had already been committed to the north in accordance to the strategy to resolve the issue of Norden once and for all, as decided by the big wigs in Military Headquarters. Therefore, they couldn't carry out the national defence plan that had been drawn up earlier.

“The western forces would like to obtain reinforcements as soon as possible, but it was estimated that this would take some time.”

According to the original plan, within 24 hours of mobilization orders, including the standing defence division that would move out first, there would be three divisions that would provide emergency reinforcements. In 72 hours, ten divisions would be dispatched from central. As for the continental army headquarters, they would commit twenty regular divisions and sixty divisions of reservist forces within a week, a truly overwhelming scale of military strength.

That was why the western forces never imagined that they would need to conduct a battle to stall for almost a month. And of course, since the plan took reinforcements into consideration, the aim of stalling the overall battle progression was to minimize the personnel losses of the western forces.

The strategy the western forces had was just a limited defense plan that wasn't grand enough to launch a major counter offensive.

Despite ignoring this precondition, the price of recklessly committing large forces into Norden was more serious than imagined.

The higher-ups had panicked, and their attitude when they mobilized the Training Department as reinforcement to shore up the western defense line made this fact clear. Even the Type 95, prohibited from being taken out of the national lab as it was a top military secret, was brought here by Tanya in the name of continuing its evaluation test.

Their hand might have been forced because of the changing battlefield, but the situation was so dire that the military brass couldn't spare the effort keeping it a secret, so there was no way they could carry out the defense plans that were normally already drawn up.

The continental army, which was viewed as the main force of the Empire, had been deployed to the north because of the error in strategic judgement. Reorganizing and redeploying the units would only take a short period of time physically, but from the relative perspective of the military, it would be very long.

“How goes the mustering of reinforcements?”

It was easy to tell that they had not thought ahead of the need to spread out their forces, which made the situation even more troubling. Even a well planned operation was difficult to execute perfectly without hiccups, and even more so for such an impromptu maneuver.

Hence, one couldn't expect much from the current mustering of reinforcements. After understanding this point, how slow the reinforcement would actually be and how that would impact the battlefield was a matter of life and death for the western forces. It was also the main concern of the Imperial soldiers who had to stand fast at the very front before the continental army arrived.

“Not looking good. As most of the delivery trucks had been sent to the north, it would take about two weeks to redeploy the units to the west.”

First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf seemed to have doubts about the wait being just two weeks. HQ will always give optimistic timelines in terms of reinforcements. He already learned this fact during previous combat experiences.

Redeployment sounds simple, but it wasn't just reorganizing the units and set up a new command structure; the units and men also needed to be resupplied before they could move out, not an easy task to be implemented in real life. Just moving an army would consume resources. Not just in terms of fuel for transport, intangible factors such as fatigue could not be ignored as well.

“As of now, the overall strategy for the western defense line has shifted to a more maneuverability-oriented stance rather than the previous stalling tactic.”

That was why Tanya wasn't surprised when her supervisor stated this casually. Since it was determined that stalling for time would not be enough, it was natural that a more mobility oriented defense strategy would be adopted. Using the bases situated in the rear that were reinforced out of fear of enemy long distance artillery bombardment as the starting point, the distance they had previously retreated when conducting their stalling operation was instead re-allocated for maneuver warfare.

“Second lieutenant, I don't think I need to say this... But this is a classic example where talk is easier than action.”

“Yes, Sir, I understand.”

Originally, the internal mobilization strategy had dictated they were to halt the progression of enemy advancement along the previously indicated defense line such that reinforcements from the continental army would then be able to annihilate the enemy forces that had overextended. However, since the defence line had already collapsed, the battle has all but turned into a dangerous hike across thin

ice which could only be described as bitter and unenjoyable. While one might inquire just what kind of defensive battle would then be considered otherwise, the most notable example which came to mind would probably be that famous hikikomori's Maginot Line¹. If it was that place, one could hide there all the way until the war ends.

For Tanya, this was a problem that should have been addressed prior to the failure which had occurred on the strategic level. Long before implementing the strategy which had failed even before the fighting had started, concepts such as sealing the borders through the use of fortresses should have been used since attrition warfare was already selected as the overall defensive approach for the Western borders. For the higher-ups to have assumed that the Francois Republic would simply ignore the threat of the encirclement strategy collapsing and allow the defeat of the Federation to happen, such naivety had left Tanya dumbstruck. The price of this miscalculation was literally paid via the blood of soldiers such as Tanya and Schwarzkopf who were forced to salvage the current situation, which was something that Tanya found to be difficult to accept.

“We are soldiers. We have to complete our missions if the higher-ups command us to do so.”

Raising the flag of revolution because of the incompetence of national leaders for the sake of an unsalvageable homeland was something only patriots would do. However, Tanya had no intentions of dying for the Empire. That was why she often paid civilities that went against what she truly felt, acting out the role the other party expected of her. For the sake of this, she was even willing to give a Tsuji-like² speech, to which from the bottom of her heart she viewed in disdain, but if necessary, she would even put up with shouting “Patriotism is justified.”

¹ **Maginot Line**, France spent a significant amount of their national budget (3.3 billion franc in the year 1930) to construct this defensive line. The sad thing was that Germany had no intention of attacking and went around it, resulting in the units garrisoning the Maginot defence line being unable to contribute to the war effort. The classic example of how a concept might be good, but no matter how great an idea was, it would be useless if its potential couldn't be brought out.

² **Tsujiinkyuu** つじーん級. The origin of the word refers to the bizarre military officer Masanobu Tsuji. It describes a person who is mediocre (the hardworking but half-baked type), and further possesses the capability to take actions. Regardless of whether it was a good thing or not, the person has a strong sense of pride, and all in all, a highly toxic person. Someone who was prone to making self-guided decisions, taking actions on their own without seeking permission or advice. His actions has resulted in people realizing just how critical a decent leadership was to the military organization. Yet despite all of the blunders he made, no punishment was ever handed out and he somehow was able to enjoy an extremely successful career and later on became a member of Diet and was even re-elected twice. This world is really filled with mysteries.

Saying it as naturally as if she was breathing, that and her doll-like appearance often gave others an impression of a “patriot.”

Most important of all, in typical cases—It was the sincere thoughts of soldiers who risk their lives on the frontlines to despise the so called activists that remain in the safety of the rear to only ever talk about in words things such as “patriotism” and “loyalty”. However, the oath of a combat veteran who earned their fame in the battlefield, and have proven to be self-sacrificial and patriotic, was different. It was due to these extreme conditions, they interpreted Tanya’s words to be a confession of faith.

“...It’s as you said, Lieutenant Degurechaff.”

And so, Tanya respected the type who completed their task faithfully with a mild attitude, a model of the Imperial Army.

“Wonderful. Back to topic then.”

“Yes, Sir!”

At least she wasn’t an incompetent soldier. Hence, with a deep sense of satisfaction, First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf felt more relaxed upon receiving good news during such a depressing situation.

Without a clear strategic goal, he had to lead a unit that was to be mobilized temporary in a defensive battle. He lost many subordinates to enemy attacks, the replacements were a bunch of greenhorns, and their leader is a little girl? In the eyes of First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf, just the fact that Second Lieutenant Degurechaff was an officer that could be of use was one of the handful of silver linings.

“Within the mobile defence formation, our 205th Assault Mage Squadron has been selected to be part of the QRF¹.”

In the end, the performance of First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf’s squadron during the initial stages of enemy assault as well as their overall level of training had resulted in them being selected for the role of the Quick Reaction Force; their role was to rush to reinforce places that needed assistance. This role was very different from other units.

“We are the axis behind counterattacks. As a comrade with this heavy responsibility, I look forward to your performance.”

“Thank you for your trust, First Lieutenant. I will do my best to protect the Fatherland.”

She looked into First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf’s eyes with her clear blue pupils, and spoke about the noble ideals of contributing to the nation with childish lips. Tanya Degurechaff’s action didn’t have a shred of sincerity in them; she made this speech just because of the circumstances she was in.

It might be from war films and books of another world, but Tanya knew how terrible trench warfare was, and welcomed being placed in the counteroffensive reserves, instead of the trenches with horrendous conditions.

It was understandable for amateurs to think after a superficial glance that defending a base made from concrete seems safer. In the eyes of those who knew the defense’s advantage after the invention of machine guns, it was an undeniable fact that a fortification had strong defensive power. Anyone receiving orders from General Nogi to charge Port Arthur² with their mere mortal bodies would not hesitate to make an “accident” happen at headquarters. Humans are too frail compared to rebar and concrete.

¹ **QRF**, Quick Reaction Force

² **Port Arthur** was widely regarded as one of the most strongly fortified positions in the world at the time (1905).

But one must not forget the fact that the fort in Port Arthur was decimated by heavy naval artillery. Bases have the critical structural flaw of being immobile. History has already taught that no matter how strong a fort is, it would just be a target before siege artillery. With that idea in mind, a mobile unit out in the field that could escape anywhere in an emergency was safer than garrisoning a fixed structure, Tanya knew this very well.

If one tried to attack from close range a “stronghold with tough defenses,” even a mage wouldn’t escape unscathed. Though one should also know how a ‘stronghold with strong defenses would be ravaged by artillery. In contrast, “attacking the exhausted enemy vanguard that broke through the defense line” was much safer.

That’s why Tanya kept making fake confessions of loyalty, the only truth being her joy at her assigned unit. Even raising her survivability just a little would undoubtedly make one happy.

“Very good. Any questions?”

“Yes, Sir. Will we be based within the defence line? Or behind the defense line?”

There was one point of to take note. There were two types of QRF. One was positioned at the back, and react quickly to seal the gaps broken through by the enemy’s attack; the other type set off from the defense lines to suppress the rearguard of the enemy. The difference between the two was the better conditions of the back, compared to a defense line that had to dig trenches and build fortifications, while fearing enemy attacks. There was a huge difference in their respective conditions.

Of course, one would need to charge to the frontlines to fill in the breaks, so there was an element of danger in that; but in order to launch a counteroffensive, there usually would be an advantage in numbers. In other words, one wouldn’t need to worry about counterattacks in an overwhelmingly disadvantageous situation.

“Rejoice, Lieutenant. It’s the frontlines.”

“It’s my honour.”

That was the worst.

As a QRF unit in the frontlines? Which means they had to defend their line and double as the feint counter offensive force? It won’t matter how many lives she had. If it was trench warfare, she could use the people around her as meatshields, but she couldn’t do so if she left the fortification to feint a counter attack. It might sound amazing to pincer attack enemy forces with the reinforcements from behind, but they were just acting as glorified moving targets.

“I knew you would be happy for this. Depending on the situation, we will need to support the defence lines.”

As expected, should I be happy? Her ominous feeling hitting the mark wasn’t a pleasant experience. This might be a great ability for risk management, but it would be best if she wouldn’t ever need it in her life.

“Meaning our role is primarily to act as a quick reaction force, and also as support for the defense line?”

“Your speculation is correct.”

Not only was she tied down to the defence line, she also had to move out as a QRF unit on a whim. Who could bear with that? There should be a limit on how much you could overwork someone. It made her want to request for better work conditions, or a raise at the very least.

But of course, since this was part of the contract, I will perform my military duty without complaint. Still, this is far too harsh, enough that I would wish to be fairly compensated.

“Nevertheless our mission isn’t to annihilate the enemy, just to fend them off. We don’t need to go out of the way to surround and destroy them.”

“This is terrible. The mustering of the continental army doesn’t seem to be going well.”

“Oh, you can tell?”

“If we don’t adopt a mobile defence that focuses on sapping the enemy's forces, and only concentrate on stalling the enemy’s movement, we won’t be able to last until reinforcements arrive. Even a rookie officer can tell that.”

There wasn’t any way to conduct a successful stalling defences on the vast battlefield. If they didn’t adopt the strategy of mobile defence with the purpose of grinding away the enemy’s forces, they wouldn’t be able to suppress their attacks. So they would have to intentionally allow the enemy to break through and attack them—that was just how bad the situation was. At least, it was an organized mobile defence, so it probably wouldn’t be as horrible as the Eastern Front¹, but Tanya still needed to steel herself.

“—What a harsh way of putting it. That’s fine, I can’t fight a cheerful war anyway. Here are your flight members.”

“Yes, please let me read this.”

Readying herself, Tanya read the document given to her, and studied the details of the first subordinates under her in this life. However the content on it was too ridiculous, it made Tanya’s brain literally freeze up. When she came to her senses, she realized she was trembling. She didn’t toss the documents away unconsciously

¹ The **Eastern Front** of World War II was a theatre of conflict between the European Axis powers and co-belligerent Finland against the Soviet Union, Poland and other Allies, which encompassed Northern, Southern and Central and Eastern Europe from 22 June 1941 to 9 May 1945.

because of her reason winning over her instincts, but because she was too stunned. In her words, this was “Just too much.”

“Our forces are lacking manpower in all areas, and my third flight is affected by this; ‘we can only get freshly trained soldiers who have never fought in battle before as replacements’— That’s what I thought, but now I have to correct myself... Is it wrong to say these replacements are untrained recruits?”

“Your interpretation is correct. This means your flight will be severely undertrained. That’s why I hope you will agree in making defending the base your main duty.”

Hastily sending in mages that have just completed the basic training in the Cadet Corps to a combat unit... Anyone who had an inkling of sorcery warfare would laugh thinking this was an April Fool’s joke. Four Mages form a flight, twelve will form a squadron, the extreme example of elitism. Even if someone had the potential to be a mage, a rookie that only attended basic training would just get in the way. This was as good as forcing a rookie who had just memorized the army regulations and operations manual on how to fly a plane. This was beyond the realm of a turkey shoot¹.

I see, based on his instruction to focus on base defence, this is a roundabout way of telling me that we are not considered a fighting unit. In the end, anyone who has expectations of such a fighting unit probably has something wrong with their head. First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf’s judgement is understandable.

“Squadron Captain, I have a suggestion for you as a flight leader...”

“Lieutenant Degurechaff, I know it is a trying task for you to fight a war while babying kids. Even though it is strange for me to tell *you* that.”

¹ A **Turkey Shoot** is an opportunity for an individual or a party to very easily take advantage of a situation.

“I will be blunt, instead of forming a flight, I will be of more use if I fight alone. I have to give you this advice.”

You understand the flight lacks training, so you are using it as a stationary force? They might not be able to withstand the rigors of high maneuver oriented battles, so while they are re-educated and retrained, use them as base defence? In other words, you want the incompetent to hold me back right!? With an unspeakable rage within her, Tanya vehemently protested in the face of this crisis. As long as the military regulations that Tanya learned in Officer Cadet School weren't revised, being a nanny was definitely not part of the scope of a soldier's job.

I would just send these rookies, who would just drag me down, to die; I will be safer if I get my freedom back. I will do that given the chance. No, I haven't even seen them yet; it's too hasty to write them off as incompetent yet.

“As an officer, I have no plans to give up on my command obligations, but please consider the best way to use our forces.”

“These fellows are the reserve forces. If the situation warrants for it, you will need to perform guerilla missions as well.”

Even though he mentioned that he would try to send the flight to the field, First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf hinted from the very start that he would send Tanya out by herself if there was a need.

“Understood. Are we allowed to abandon our post if there is a demand?”

“Regrettably, the battlefield cannot be pushed back any further.”

“So we have to defend it to the death?”

“Command seems to be asking us to choose either victory or Valhalla¹.”

Victory or Valhalla? Can that be considered a choice? This is probably a subtle way of telling us to fight to the last. No, it would be strange to call it subtle, this is just a narcissistic lie.

Why should I die for others? If someone dies for me, that is their freedom, but forcing me to die for others completely go against my free will.

Only freedom reigns supreme. Be it democracy, nationalism and even imperialism, it is by my freedom to acknowledge them. So please, stop issuing war bonds². Issuing more war bonds on the assumption that the Empire will win in order to raise war funds will result in hyperinflation no matter if we win or lose.

It doesn't matter whether we achieve victory or defeat; a better future will only exist in our imaginations, how unpleasant.

“Wonderful. I like both options.”

“Splendid. Let's introduce you to the members of the squadron then.”

Alright, time to greet the comrades who will labor together with me in this unpleasant war. Depending on the time and place, they might even become my human shields. Allow me to look forward to this from the bottom of my heart.

And so, the young maiden and the little girl unwillingly fought side by side in the west. They drink the same muddy water, dodging hails of bullets, gnaw on

¹ **Valhalla**, The place where the souls of the heroes who died in battle are summoned. In other words, asking someone to choose victory or Valhalla means if you don't want to die, you must achieve victory. But most of them will go to Valhalla anyway.

² **War bonds** are debt securities issued by a government to finance military operations and other expenditure in times of war. In practice, modern governments finance war by putting additional money into circulation, and the function of the bonds is to remove money from circulation and help to control inflation.

“rations” that can’t even be chewed without dicing it with bayonets... and continue fighting.

My first impression of the Imperial Army officer Second Lieutenant Degurechaff of the Western Front, Seventh Field Army, 205th Assault Mage Squadron—who was my direct supervisor—it would be "Vampire." Her sickly white skin and sharp eyes that despise the sun definitely surprised me.

In the beginning, we gathered under the order of First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf, and a small child that fitted unnaturally well with her uniform appeared. She couldn’t be a cadet from the Cadet Corps, she’s not even old enough to enroll yet. She tied up her messy hair in a simple manner, and wore a peaked cap that was slightly oversized for her. Normal soldiers would do a double-take in doubt if they saw such a young girl wearing the rank of Second Lieutenant.

However, until the moment the Squadron Captain introduced her to us, there wasn’t any signs which suggested something was “amiss” regarding Second Lieutenant Degurechaff. I couldn’t express it well, but it was as if it was natural for her to be there.

Nevertheless, the moment she used her cold gaze and stared at me as if she was gauging the value of an object, I couldn’t help but shrink away. Others might laugh at me for being afraid of such a young child, but to me, her gaze was like “a cat toying with a mouse” which scared me.

Just as Erya said, Second Lieutenant Degurechaff was a veteran soldier and an ace, having earned numerous meritorious awards on top of her Silver Wings Assault medal. She had a strong aura of battle around her, a delicate face that was almost doll-like, blue and empty eyes, and blonde hair with a hint of grey.

In the Rhine Battlefield where sunlight was scarce, she looked just like a vampire, or so as I muttered within my heart.

When she rushed us to state our rank, name, and unit in a calm tone without any room for doubt, I felt the urge to run away. The Cadet Corps had a simple way of splitting the cadets, since volunteers and conscripts won't understand each other even if they train together. The Corps knew this very well, and split the mages from the very start into volunteer and conscript classes, which were C Wing whose path will lead them to Officer Cadet School, and D Wing cadets who were just completing part of their obligation.

My two cadet mates were elites from the C Wing.

"I am Corporal Kristorp von Barleholuth from Italu Schuden C Wing, 1st Squadron!"

"I am Corporal Harald von Weisz, also from Italu Schuden C Wing, 1st Squadron!"

I reported my own rank and name after the two Volunteer Wing cadets. It's not that I was ashamed of not being from the Volunteer Wing, but it's difficult to say that I was a conscript right after people who said they were volunteers. Even so, my skin wasn't so thick that I won't mind and just laugh it off. Oh god, why do you torment me so?

"I am Corporal Victoria Ivanovna Serbiakof from Italu Schuden D Wing, 3rd Squadron."

You could say that I felt out of place to be the only one from the Conscript Wing. After all, Corporal Kristorp and Harald were volunteers from the same squadron. Going by tradition, the two of them will be partners, and I will be partnered with the Flight Leader.

That's why when I was reporting that, I was thinking it would be great if I didn't get lectured for being a slow and unmotivated conscript. Due to my way of thinking, I was dumbstruck by what the Second Lieutenant said next.

“My deepest respect to you for carrying out your obligations, Corporal Victoria Ivanovna Serbiakof. The environment is harsh, but I pray you will do your best to survive.”

It was words of encouragement. And it came from an officer with eyes so cold that I thought she was more suitable for war than anyone else. At this instant, I couldn't understand the situation and froze.

At the same time—

“Also, for the two gentlemen who enlisted voluntarily: since you joined by your own will, don't die later than Corporal Serbiakof and I.”

She didn't change her calm tone, her voice didn't get louder. Her face was expressionless as she spoke, but her words seemed heavier than ever.

“First, I will make it clear that the Empire can't spare the effort to groom incompetent potential officers. In fact, that would be detrimental.”

A different atmosphere from the drill instructors. She was talking with a strange attitude for a soldier of the Empire. For me, this was the opposite of the values instilled into me since my conscription.

“It's a different matter if it's someone who was forced to serve in the forces against their will because of the needs of the nation, but since you volunteered to adorn the uniform of the Fatherland, then contribute accordingly. If you are too incompetent to do that, then die.”

Perhaps it was due to having finished saying the things that she had wanted to say, the three of us who were completely stupefied by her words were immediately kicked to the field after the Squadron Captain announced, “That is all, dismissed.” When we realized it, we were thrown into the trenches right after reporting to the unit, and endured the periodic artillery bombardment from the Republican military.

What awaited us there was the verification of our skills and foundations as mages. We also learned that we were not just wage thieves, we were even worse than trash.

Unhappy about being humiliated, Corporal Kristorp and Harald showed signs of resistance, but they weren't punished...on the surface that is. After the Squadron Captain and the Second Lieutenant spoke about "I can't take care of them on the front lines," they were assigned to the rear.

After a short period of live combat, I became Second Lieutenant Degurechaff's partner as a member of her Flight.

On the other hand, the two other cadets were promoted. They were promoted two levels higher and were assigned to the squadron's base defense, staying inside the safe fortress as the reserve force for the counteroffensive. However, one thing I learned when flying on missions was that... For artillery, an immobile fortress was just a sturdier than average target.

This happened when I received orders to engage the enemy breaching unit being supported by heavy Republic artillery. We were to flank them while they were suppressed by our own artillery bombardment. I was snivelling then, thinking I would definitely die as I followed my seniors in the squadron who were smiling for some unknown reason. Our allied base was bombarded, while we were unscathed.

Incredibly, we barely encountered any attacks, we also didn't suffer any meaningful losses before we engaged the enemy. After experiencing this multiple times, I realized that artillery had the problem of needing to be used in a well coordinated manner.

The reason was simple when I thought about it carefully. The chances of hitting flying targets with machine guns was higher than doing so with artillery. As long as we didn't venture into a place with anti-aircraft guns, the machine guns would only attack aircrafts. Even though mages were slower than aircrafts, we are still too fast for the artillery to consider us as realistic targets.

It would be a different matter if we were to assault a fortified position or structure and would be suffering from heavy enclosure fire, but if we were to fight on our own territory, I was taught that speed was everything. Veteran mages all held a suspicious attitude towards being in fixed position. I am fortunate to have learned that from Second Lieutenant Degurechaff and First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf.

In conclusion, the only god we could trust on the battlefield was the artillery, who was also a god we must not cross, certainly so. If we didn't learn to make this god our partner, and how to avoid it's hammer of fury, humans won't be able to live on.

Maybe that was why my supervisor was an absolute believer in firepower with no grounds for debate in preaching that it was the avatar of mobile warfare. She would finally show the demeanour of a mage after that. The only belief of my supervisor was in the artillery.

Could a group of pragmatic soldiers believe in god? Her answer to this was very interesting. When I mentioned this in my letter to Erya, she wrote in her reply that, "Then I am the war goddess that controls the will of the heavens." This answer really suited her style, which made me laugh heartily. Such a good way of putting it.

Because of the existence of our eyes and ears, the devoted believers squatting in the frontline, trenches and fortified positions could receive the divine revelation of the artillery.

Due to the contribution of the forward observers, we could call for the artillery to neutralize the enemy when we fell into danger. This made me recall the figure of Erya who said she had a cushy job where she could drink tea and loaf around, but she was always taking care of others, so she must be working responsibly too.

Right before we begin an airborne assault, what the squadron wished for the most was the supporting fire from the artillery. After receiving orders to counter attack the Republican army that broke through our defence lines, we would attack the

enemy from the flank in concert with the bombardment of the artillery in order to obliterate the enemy.

On the now-familiar battlefield, my only job as a rookie was to follow behind Second Lieutenant Degurechaff. Even the Squadron Captain teased us, saying we were the ideal two-man team, but I still need more combat experience.

“Oooh, let us give praise to God. His name is Artillery! That is what he is to me right now. Truly, such a wondrous sound!”

First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf’s face was full of smiles as he praised the wonderful timing by the artillery squadrons. As for myself, who had barely managed to hold steady under the intensive firing of the artillery batteries, all I can say at this moment is that the taste in music between the two of us appears to be quite different.

“Without a doubt, it is the God of the Battlefield! Our prayers, given in the form of radio petition, God has answered them!”

“Artillery, oh artillery, thou art our friend and our savior!”

The general atmosphere within the squadron was filled with excitement. Even the usually tight-faced veterans of the First Flight were unable to contain their emotions. Although the way they praised the timing of the artillery support might indeed seem overly exaggerated, I nevertheless have to agree with the part regarding it being our savior. This was something I had learned, because even though our squadron was part of the counterattacking forces, our responsibilities were mostly only to restrain the movement of enemy troops such that it would be easy for our artillery squads to then handle the rest.

As long as we successfully surrounded the enemy, regardless of the situation, whether if it was a particular assault unit, defensive unit or even enemy artillery units, everything would be turned to dust by the bombardment of our artillery. Just experiencing it once is enough to change one's perspective where you couldn't help but to wish from the depths of your heart for your prayers to be answered. O God, please grant me the support of our artillery.

The firing preparations performed prior to an assault have always served as a reliable way for the weak-hearted to strengthen their resolve. One time, during an assault where our support was delayed, our wing-sized unit composed of various different mage squadrons at the time was forced to engage with an enemy echelon¹ (teidan) the size of a brigade...the events which followed after were something which if possible, I do not ever wish to recall.

Hence, in situations where an adequate amount of support was provided, as well as there being a sufficient amount of space available for maneuvering, it could only be described as circumstances where one could finally relax their shoulders from the previous baggage received on the battlefield. Indeed, it appears like I was able to survive once again this time.

The scene revealed in front of Tanya's eyes as she stared through the binoculars was of the moment when the artillery shells had theoretically hit the ground, turning the people within the blast radius into nothing but fertilizers. In the end, this was ultimately the correct way to conduct warfare, which involved the process of converting organic life forms known as humans into something not quite as organic.

“Nevertheless, it really is a spectacular scene, First Lieutenant. Watching the fireworks display of a concentrated rain of 120mm shells coming into life, that is. It was even better than what I had previously envisioned.”

“Just as you said, Second Lieutenant. It seems like the synergy between the observer and the artillery unit this time around was particularly on point. From the

¹ **Echelon (梯団teidan)** - Military term. During an attack, the first wave is called the first teidan, the next one is called the 2nd teidan. When several units are grouped together, such terms would be used. TL: There is no direct English term as far as I can tell, the closest English military word to match it is “echelon” but it is not a perfect fit.

pre-adjustments to the final firing of the rounds, everything was done perfectly. Not a single shell went to waste.”

It was always easier for people to be able to remain calm and steady as long as things proceeded smoothly, and the same applied to those on the battlefield. According to the teachings of the Chicago School of Economics, everything in this world can be measured using the rules of economics; however it was still by no means an easy challenge for one to appropriately measure the outcome of experiencing smooth sailing on the physical and mental state of the human body. The feeling of not incurring any additional expense, without having to perform redundant tasks, and to have every piece fall in place as planned, such was a wonderful situation that could only be described as heavenly when encountered.

The situation on hand had unfolded before of the eyes of the 205th Assault Mage Squadron went exactly as described. *Similar to the way Lieutenant Schwarzkopf had praised them, I must agree that the skills shown by the artillery squads this time around were indeed superb.* Perhaps it was due to their close working relationship, but from the moment of the very first shot to all the way until the end, the entire process was spectacularly executed.

It was thanks to this that the 205th Assault Mage Squadron was able to successfully conduct their assault. The enemy echelon was completely suppressed by the overwhelming firepower of our artillery, to the point where even signs of collapse had begun to appear. Originally, the situation was likely to have progressed into a shooting battle between the artillery units of both sides, where our forces would also have been on the receiving end from the retaliatory fire of the enemy artillery. However, from the way things turned out, it appears that the enemy artillery units were preoccupied and were unable to provide us with any entertainment.

“Looks like we get to clean up the leftover enemy troops that had managed to survive the 120mm shells of our artillery corps. What a stroke of good fortune for us.”

“Seems like it indeed.”

It was just as Lieutenant Schwarzkopf had said, the luck of the squadron this time around couldn't have been any better, or at least from the perspective of Second

Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff, today was the best day one could have hoped for to conduct a battle. The only thing they needed to do was to maintain their advantage on the battlefield and slowly suppress the remaining enemy infantry which were already on the verge of collapse. Simple and straightforward.

“It’s almost time. All units, prepare for takeoff. We’ve got preys that need hunting.”

And so, following the orders given by the Squadron Captain, I carried in one hand my rifle preloaded with magic-engraved bullets while holding the operation orb in the other, preparing for the coming assault.

The brief moment before takeoff as the entire squadron waited on standby for incoming orders from the Squadron Captain was always a period in which even experienced veterans couldn’t help but feel a slight tinge of anxiety. Amidst the background noise of bullet fire and explosions, the distinct sound of swallowing due to nervousness when heard would often seem extra clear to the ears, and it had always left a strong impression on my mind even to this day when thinking back.

“It’s time. Everyone, await by my command... Now if only every time it was as easy as this, how wonderful that would be!”

From Tanya’s perspective, to be able to conduct battles under the lead of a competent military officer such as First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf was truly an outcome which deserved to be rejoiced about, or at least, compared to the situation that the enemy remnant forces were currently facing, it could definitely be described as being hundreds or thousands times better. After all, war was always something that forces people into performing tasks that they do not wish to do, so one could only hope to be assigned to missions with high survival rate.

However, if one were to ask whether or not Tanya considered herself to be happy, the only response you would receive would be nothing but strings of curses and insults directed at a certain Existence X for throwing such a young and innocent child like herself onto the battlefield. Even when looking at things from an objective point of view, compared to the absolute of the worst, people would always tend to pick the lesser of the two.

“Second Lieutenant, remember to never be picky about food, or else you will never grow to be taller.”

“Squadron Captain Schwarzkopf, I think I am fine the way things are. Having a smaller surface area greatly reduces the likelihood of being hit by enemy fire.”

“...I concede, Second Lieutenant. I have to say this is the best excuse I’ve heard for being a picky eater.”

In the eyes of Lieutenant Schwarzkopf who was currently waiting for an opportune moment to begin the strike, the response made by Second Lieutenant Degurechaff served as the perfect follow-up to break the tension. During times of both ancient and modern, it has always been a practice for commanders of all levels to try to reduce as much of the anxiety felt within in his troops as possible before the assault.

Even for the 105th Assault Mage Squadron lead by Lieutenant Schwarzkopf, which could be counted as one of the veteran squadrons with numerous years of experience serving on the Rhine battlefield, tension could still often be felt during the moment before an assault. It was reasons such as this which resulted in the Lieutenant deciding to seize the moment just as the atmosphere had relaxed due to a simple joke and began to execute the assault.

After having alerted the artillery squadrons and having received the green light from the Air Controller, Lieutenant Schwarzkopf finally initiated the operation.

“Alright everyone, make sure to not let Second Lieutenant Degurechaff hog all the good food!”

Quietly chuckling at one side while thanking God that the squadron was able to remain calm before the enemy, First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf roared out the next few words using his well-practiced voice.

“Begin!! Follow my lead!”

The entire squadron took off from their resting positions and drastically accelerated towards the enemy location.

In the eyes of the enemy infantry, the threat posed from aerial mages that fly at you from high above could be considered just as deadly as being bombarded by artillery. Most of all, mages all possessed safeguards in the form of defense barriers and protective membranes strong enough to easily withstand a rain of rifle bullets. On top of that, they are capable of unleashing firepower no less than the

equivalent of heavy weaponry. They could truly be considered as overpowered.

There are very limited amount of methods for infantry to choose from when facing up against the terror of mages on the battlefield. One of them was to make use of hand grenades. This method could only ever be applied when the opposing mages just happen to be within the attack range of the grenade, which in most situations rarely ever occurred, and even then the amount of damage it could cause was subjective. The only other method was to combine their firepower through synchronizing their aim and concentrating it at a single target. Apart from that, infantry units have almost no way of combating aerial mages.

Therefore, even if the enemy squadron only consisted of a dozen or so magicians, from the perspective of the Republican echelon which had already lost their command structure due to the artillery bombardment, the threat posed from the incoming mages was no less than what they had previously faced. What made it worse was that the mage squadrons which were usually in charge of preventing enemy air assaults had most likely perished as well; even for mages it was very difficult to withstand the impact of artillery shells.

The current situation could be considered as a blessing for the incoming squadron while in the eyes of the Republican military, their luck couldn't have been any worse. The 120mm shells fired by the Imperial military through sheer coincidence had landed directly on the Republican mages in midair, beautifully turning them into minced meat.

"Make sure to target enemy commanders and communication officers first!"

Isn't that obvious?

The thought occurred in Tanya's mind as she headed directly towards the crowd of soldiers that had the most figures carrying backpacks with antennas sticking out. Following the same methods as the other members of the squadron, Tanya warmly welcomed these uninvited guests from the Republic with an enthusiastic embrace filled with explosions.

From the density of the bullet fire returned by the enemy infantry, one could tell that the resistance the enemy soldiers were putting up was very weak. At most, it was only a handful or so of infantry units shooting blindly into the sky; the majority of the soldiers had already given up and started fleeing. The current situation of the battle had already progressed to the sweeping stage.

If it was any other time, there would still be worries about potential reinforcements coming from the enemy rearguard, but this time around the mixed forces consisting of our secondary artillery team and the special strike team were keeping them tied up. Hence, the current situation could literally be considered as the sweeping up of the remaining soldiers.

This provided Tanya enough leeway to carefully observe the battlefield in detail, whereas on previous occasions, the most she was able to do was to observe whether or not Corporal Serbiakof was still following behind, as well as her overall performance during battle. From Tanya's perspective, even though Corporal Serbiakof was often on the receiving end of rifle fire, her defensive barrier has always held on steadily during those times. Her movements when flying was still at a basic textbook level, but when compared to just one month ago, it had readily improved. Her current progress can be considered as acceptable but more effort could be put in.

Looking back, the current situation of sweeping up remaining enemy forces that are on the brink of collapsing would serve as a great combat exercise for the newly-enlisted soldiers to gain battle experience. When this thought occurred in my mind, I couldn't help but recall the words previously spoken by Lieutenant Schwarzkopf; live-combat really does serve as the best practice for gaining experiences.

"I really miss the moments of seeing faces turn green from fear as well as the vomiting that followed after. Dear, oh dear, soldiers really cannot do without having gone through strict disciplining."

One should never make light of mankind's potential. For Tanya who had once more come to terms with such matters, could not help but to admire the near infinite possibilities that could be realized from developing each and every individual's potential. It was for reasons like this which showed just how inspiring the dignity and free-will held by mankind truly was.

This had almost caused her to pity the soldiers of the Republican military. When facing against the incoming barrages of enemy bombardment, the only instructions

they had received was to blindly charge forward. For such tactless orders to have been issued by their headquarters without any regard, it was as if they were still living in the past while technology and military tactics had advanced. It was clearly demonstrated ten years ago during the conflict which had taken place in the far east between the Union and the Imperium¹, where the whole world was shown exactly how much weaponry trumped manpower.

It truly was frightening to imagine the end of those that had lost their progressive spirit. Losing such would equally mean that they had lost their potential as human beings, although it was thanks to this that vast amounts of resources with potential were quickly lost and processed into minced meat by the Empire, but one still couldn't help but to bitterly shake their head at the irony which had transpired.

It was at times like this which people would start to wonder whether or not they should re-evaluate the capital worth of individual humans accordingly to the supply and demand of the market.

Unfortunately, all things in this world are bound by contract. As a soldier of the Empire, the only relationship Tanya could ever establish with the aggressors of the Republic was that of a kill-or-be-killed relationship. *Good grief, even though it was expected that every country would naturally use propaganda to praise the commendability of those willing to self-sacrifice for their nation, but I really wish they would understand that this would mean one would also be expected to kill for their nation.*

No matter what, nothing could be as sinful as war in terms of letting precious human resources go to waste. For Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff, who once again was just moments away from taking the lives and futures of several promising young men, lamented as she directed her spells at them.

Truly, things just never turn out how you want them to be.

All the while as she murmured within her heart, spells after spells were unleashed at enemy soldiers, mercilessly turning them into carcasses filled with base organic

¹ The original text had it as (皇国koukoku) which roughly translates to Empire in English. It is different to the main “**empire**” in this series which is (帝国teikoku). In order to make distinctions, we decided to call it the **Imperium** instead. 皇国 is often associated with the **Japanese Empire**, so most likely, the author was referencing to the Russo-Japanese War.

matter. The only word which came to her mind as the scene had unfolded was, “Wasteful.”

Even though these soldiers belonged to the enemy nation, the way the enemy commanders had just so thoughtlessly thrown away the lives of these people who wouldn’t have been more than twenty or so years old, Tanya couldn’t help but to feel a strong sense of discomfort. Indeed, when looking at things from this perspective, one would definitely think that over-extravagance is a sin. For a nation which had previously lived by such philosophy, who would have imagined that they would turn out to be this wasteful in managing their human resources; history truly reveals the most ironic things in the most unimaginable way. It would seem that no matter what era it is, there would always be incompetent leaders somewhere in this world needlessly throwing away the lives of their people loyal to their nation.

“Good gracious, just what am I doing, getting so sentimental on the battlefield.”

“Artilleries are plowing, magicians are descending, while the infantry units are advancing,” just when had I heard such phrases? Thinking back, the only memory I could distantly recall was the warmth of the afternoon sun shining lazily upon my back as I struggled to remain awake during the lecture on the history of warfare.

Back in Cadet School, those ordinary lessons which barely left any impressions, it was only after having applied them on the battlefield, had I finally began to realize just how awful they could be. Perhaps similar to how I had been feeling, Second Lieutenant Degurechaff often had a look of disappointment on her face during combat, but different from me, she was still able to mercilessly unleash her spells at the enemy. The actions that she performed always left me stunned but amazed at the same time, even though it required all of my efforts mustered just to keep up with her when flying, many times I still ended up on the receiving side of enemy fire, yet not a single bullet ever seemed to make their way towards the Second Lieutenant.

At moments like this, it was useless to think of such things, but those scenes that unfolded before my eyes made me realize just how large a difference there was between the two of us, but as expected, only those that had reached a whole new

dimension would have been able to receive the Silver Wing Assault medal.

“This is the Squadron Captain to all members, in 300 more seconds the second round of artillery will begin. Prepare to fall back.”

And then, during the brief period that I was lost in thoughts, the remaining enemy forces had already began to the retreat. Such occurrences regularly happens to me during battle, where things would just suddenly end all the while I was still aimlessly flying in the sky. As such, I had mentally prepared myself for the next set of orders which usually involved pursuing the fleeing enemies, so it was only after having responded with an “understood” that I finally began to feel relief from within my heart.

That’s right, relief. The relief that I won’t need to feel guilty of having to chase after the enemy. I was different from Second Lieutenant Degurechaff who was able to calmly employ long distance precision-based optical attacks or explosion-based spells when pursuing after the fleeing opponents. It was because that I did not have to do so this time, I felt relief.

By the time that my mind had started to blank out from overthinking all the while as I hurriedly followed behind my superior officer, unleashing spells at various locations, the I who was in an almost trance like state was unable to think clearly. Yet nevertheless, a part of myself still hesitated when directing spells at the fleeing soldiers... To express it more clearly, I was uncertain whether or not it was morally right for me to do so.

Without a doubt, I was obligated to attack when taking into consideration my identity as Corporal Victoria Ivanovna Serbiakof of the 105th Assault Squadron, but I as Visha, was unable to do so.

“All units assembled, no casualties this time around. Nothing else were depleted apart from equipments.”

At the end, by the time we had finally landed, my mind which had been in a high state of tension throughout combat was unable to offload the pressure all in one ago, the overwhelming sense of relief rushing in had almost caused me to faint from the sudden recoil. The only thought that was in my head was to quickly go to bed and rest.

Even though I have to admit for a maiden who was at a delicate part of age there

were many inconveniences, but in the frontlines where even water was often scarce, it was just too much to hope that a shower room would exist somewhere on the battlefield for use. As such, I followed the example set by Second Lieutenant Degurechaff and simply uttered the phrase “going to bed, good night”, and attempted to lay down and rest all the while thanking to God that at least there was still a bed to sleep in.

However, God did not seem to be so kind in nature. An emergency assembly was suddenly raised, and by the time I had come around to it, everyone had already gathered outside.

“Very good. Now, to all members of the squadron, I have some not so good news to report.”

The atmosphere this time was eerily solemn. I couldn’t help but once more feel the tension building up inside of me as First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf quietly informed us of the situation. When commanding officers begin to speak in a particularly calm and composed manner, it usually suggested that something terrible was about to happen. Although it hasn’t been long since I have been in the military, but this was something that I had already picked early on while at the frontlines.

“This is an emergency report. The 304th Assault Mage Squadron encountered two enemy Mage Squadrons during their mission and is currently locked in combat.”

The report was sent by the friendly troops that were tasked with combating the follow-up enemy forces. Originally, they were to be making attacks on the secondary enemy echelon, but was obstructed by enemy reinforcements. Even though my mind was exhausted from the previous battle, I still forced myself to focus. Gradually, I was able to gain an understanding of the overall situation. The entities involved were the troops on our side, the follow-up enemy forces, and the newly appeared enemy reinforcements.

“...and the secondary echelon?”

“Currently being suppressed by our artillery units, however, the observer is being chased by enemy mages and could not provide any assessment on the impact nor provide any corrections.”

The dialogue that was currently taking place between my superior officers made me envision a future which I did not wish to recall. I couldn’t help but to sigh as I

listened closely to the exchange, murmuring quietly to myself that it looks like another battle will soon be starting.

"We must quickly rendezvous with the 304th Squadron. Prepare for immediate takeoff."

It's simply one trial after another, the high amount of morale which we had previously built up could not be so easily relit. The First Lieutenant continued on all the while my mind was still in a semi-state of confusion.

"At the same time we will have to put forward a rescue operation for the observation mage that is currently under attack by an enemy mage squadron. Speaking of which, it seemed that Second Lieutenant Degurechaff had previously encountered a similar situation like this in the northern front?"

"Yes, I do not wish to experience it a second time."

Taking on the task of being an observer for the artillery units is almost like agreeing to be the target practice for enemy mages. As long as one takes out the eyes of the opponent, the threat of enemy artillery will no longer need to be considered, any experienced veterans will emphasize on the importance of such matters when confronted. Being the eyes of the primary dominator of the battlefield is usually the equivalent of gambling away your life against fate, with the odds definitely not in your favor.

... .. Erya that liar, saying that she would be comfortably enjoying tea from the rear.

I was stunned by discovering just how dangerous it was to be a forward observer for the artillery. More importantly, even for Second Lieutenant Degurechaff who was able to calmly maneuver through a sea of bullets and explosions to have been heavily injured during her time as an observer, this made me worry all the more for Erya. The role of an Observation Mage was just that deadly.

Conversely, the situation of the observer who was being chased at this moment was definitely not a pleasant one. The more that I thought of this, the louder the voice inside of my heart screamed to have to save him. Even I myself was unsure just where this feeling was coming from.

Therefore, I must give my all in the rescue operation. After having made my

resolve, I breathed and exhaled deeply to once more re-energize my exhausted body.

However, contrary to what I was feeling, my outside appearance was still that of a mentally exhausted girl.

“I see, well then... Second Lieutenant Degurechaff, as the holder of the Silver Wing Assault medal, in your opinion just how likely will we be able to rescue the observer?”

“The longer we delay the less likely, the chances of a successful rescue is slim even if we depart now.”

“And if you were to make use of the Type 95?”

“... .. I don’t have any problems but Corporal Serbiakof seems to be at her limits already.”

Second Lieutenant Degurechaff took a single glance at my motionless figure as well as the blank expression that I had on my face, and earnestly responded back at Lieutenant Schwarzkopf’s query.

“I do not wish to become the kind of officer that just for the sake of accomplishing a rescue mission, end up killing the lives of her own men.”

“In that case, break up your two-man flight, no, forget what I just said.”

The words that had followed after, contained various emotions mixed within. The feeling of disappointment, or perhaps it was the feeling of concern, but in the end, the only conclusion that could be derived was that “there was simply no other way”.

A lot was revealed from the way how quickly Lieutenant Schwarzkopf had abandoned his initial suggestion right as he had proposed it. A two-man Flight was the absolute minimum for a unit.

If Second Lieutenant Degurechaff was to individually conduct the rescue operation, she would potentially have to face-off against the attacks of two enemy mage squadrons all by herself. While that was fine and all, but the enemy forces this time had directly launched their assault from the front, it would be reasonable

to assume there would also be follow-up reinforcements coming to cover for them. At moments like this, for Visha who would be without any teammates to be there to assist her, her chances of survival would be very slim.

Even if she was to also join the rescue operation, her current conditions which clearly showed signs of extreme fatigue both physically and mentally had caused her superior officers endless worries. It was because of this, the previous suggestion was quickly nullified. It was because of this, they were hesitating.

By the time I had finally understood this, I became unable to control my emotions and impulsively shouted with all of my might.

“Squadron Captain, permission to speak!”

“Corporal Serbiakof?”

“I willingly volunteer! I wish to volunteer for the rescue mission!”

Lieutenant Schwarzkopf remained silent and appeared doubtful. Of-course, I had interrupted my superior officers without permission, if things do not proceed well I could even be punished for it. I myself was also surprised at my suddenly found courage, previously I never would have dreamed that I would ever become this impulsive.

“Corporal!”

“I too am a soldier of the Empire! It may sound presumptuous, but I believe I am capable of completing this mission!”

From the short and stem reprimand that Second Lieutenant Degurechaff had quickly uttered, I felt as if I was being disciplined once again, but even the harshness of her voice this time could not prevent me from continuing on.

“Squadron Captain, please allow me to participate!”

“So that’s how it seems, Second Lieutenant.”

“Lieutenant Schwarzkopf!?”

The Second Lieutenant’s voice was filled with surprise and exclamation as she

widened her eyes in disbelief at how Lieutenant Schwarzkopf had responded. Her usually half-closed eyes which always emphasized her boredom and disinterest in the world had for the first time since my meeting with the Second Lieutenant widened to a point of unimaginable. Her current appearance, although it might be slightly difficult to explain, but it finally felt like it was an expression which suited a ten year old girl.

It appears that even someone as cold as the Second Lieutenant would underneath worry for the well-being and safety of her subordinates.

“Jones’s detachment will see you through to the rescue site. Begin the operation.”

“But... Lieutenant...”

“I have already made my decision. I understand your concern, Second Lieutenant, but any further it would be considered as overly protective.”

A startled expression was shown on the face of Second Lieutenant Degurechaff. Unexpectedly, she seemed to be much more emotionally driven as a person than what I had originally thought. Although it was improper for me to be saying this, but her appearance the moment she realized that her emotions were showing was surprisingly cute and refreshing. While at the same time causing me to lower my guard, the feeling that I gained was as if I was making fun of an emotionally-rich friend.

The initial vampire-like aura that she was giving off seemed to have completely vanished, revealing behind layers of emotions that were buried underneath.

Without noticing, I had grown surprisingly fond of Second Lieutenant Degurechaff ever since the first time we had met. To have realized it at a moment like this, it was truly an inexplicable feeling which had come and gone like the wind, only now had I realized that all this time I was being protected by someone much less younger than me in terms of age.

“Understood. I will do my best to complete the mission.”

“Should anything happen, we will immediately rush to your aid. Such was the long cherished wish for every magician. I wish you luck.”

“Same goes to you, Lieutenant. I wish you luck.”

After having spoken those words, the main body of the squadron immediately departed for their destination. Second Lieutenant Degurechaff, who had watched as they parted, turned her head and gave a mesmerizing smile towards me.

"Well then, Corporal. Have you finished your preparation?"

Watching my superior officer smile like that, I couldn't help but to think "as expected, her teeth really does look like that of a vampire's". Even though that was the kind of smile projected by the Second Lieutenant, I still responded back my own which was filled with confidence and warmth. That's right, I have already made my resolve. I will not abandon anyone.

"Yes, Second Lieutenant."

"Very good. Then it is time for us to begin. Sergeant Jones, we will be in your care for a little while longer."

"Leave it to us. You won't find any other unit as experienced as us on the Rhine battlefield."



“That damn intel department! What do they mean that the defence here is the weakest!?”

Their flight might seem graceful to a third party, but the imperial mages were literally scrambling in performing evasive maneuvers and deploying their optical detectors. This was the fourth one. Since just now, they had been shooting down enemy observers who were trying to escape, but the accuracy of the enemy artillery wasn't affected at all. Judging from the sound, it should be 120mm heavy shells. Maybe some 180mm or 240mm shells were mixed in.

Allied forces trying to exit the combat zone at full speed had fallen into chaos, reduced to targets by the enemy. The unit that was hastily mustered with breaching speed as its priority was foiled by its weak defences instead.

As it prioritize breaching, it had increased direct support from mages, which was the only thing going for it. But unfortunately, the areas that needed support overloaded the Forward Air Control, and the engagement efficiency was as good as shooting birds blindly.

Although the solitary enemy observers had been taken out, they must have sent out warning too. Radio interference was at its limit, and couldn't be maintained any longer. From the amount of time that had lapsed, the imperials had to assume that a sizeable engagement force or quick reaction force had been dispatched. In the worst condition, not just the ground troops the mages were supporting, even the mages would be cut off. That's how dire the situation was.

“If you have the time to sprout nonsense, move your hands! You bastards!!”

Hence, in order to assist the retreat of their allies, they have to neutralize the enemy artillery some how. The problem was how. Attacking them directly would be the simplest way. But from the scale of their bombardment, their numbers was at a joint artillery level.

If it was artillery organic to a division or battalion, there would be a chance to silence their guns by charging in with the resolve to die. But against a joint artillery, they had to take anti mage battles into consideration. Thus, they could only go for the next best option and hunt down the observers. But not only does this takes a lot of time, the effect will only be shown after some time.

“Aye Sir. Damn, optical detection is really limited. Please authorize the use of explosive spells.”

If they blow the entire place up with explosive spells, they could blast away any observers concealing themselves on the ground. Optical detection would take time to scan the ground, so it wouldn't be fast enough. They not only have to descent to a certain height, they had to search the same area repeatedly to ensure they didn't miss anything. In the beginning, they strike while the enemy wasn't paying attention, but their adversaries weren't fools either. Those who hope that their opponents were fools, were the real fools.

News of our attack must have spread, prompting the other observers to hide themselves. And finding them would take a tremendous amount of effort.

“At this pace, we won't be able to take out half of them.”

That was the reason behind the proposal to blow the entire suspicious zone away. This was a reasonable method. In actual fact, in the beginning phases of artilleries battles, scouts from both side would search for the enemy position as they use anti personnel grenades to hinder the enemy. If they were lucky, they might take out an entire enemy scouting platoon. But this method was only viable with a certain level of supporting fire.

It would require a squadron to maintain an attack at maximum burst level the entire time. The burden would increase their combat potential, but would be too heavy

for the unit performing the direct coverage. If the scale was large enough to scorch the entire land, it would adversely affect combat sustainability.

“Impossible. In the long term, it will just hinder our progress.”

Speaking of long term, they were really unlucky.

“High mana reaction! Enemy mages suspected to be reinforcements are approaching fast!”

“Ah, damn it! Stop the hunt for the observers! Prepare to engage!”

Their forces were scattered and the troops were exhausted. Military doctrines would normally strongly discourage fighting in such conditions, but those were just theories in books after all. In actual combat, they wouldn't be having such a hard time if they could follow the doctrine. As the leading echelon had yet to break off their engagement with the enemy, if the follow up unit was to withdraw, they would literally be wiped out.

Of course, judging from the overhead view of the ground units, it was a fact that the entire army was retreating. However the speed of mages and ground forces were incomparable.

It was easy to imagine the ground units being annihilated by the artillery fire directed by the observers while the allied mages evaded the assault of the enemy mages.

That was why they had to secure this air space. Not every battle could be avoided.

“All units, allied observer is down. I say again, allied observer is down.”

When she received this notification, Second Lieutenant Mage Tanya Degurechaff mumbled with an irked face, “Enough already.”

What crossed her mind right now was if only they had set off slightly earlier, or even a bit later—such was her complaint.

The terrible timing made her want to curse. They couldn’t make it in time to reinforce their allies, but were too close to the enemy to fall back now. There wasn’t any other choice but to take on this difficult endeavor that offered negligible reward.

“...To all Flight members, listen up. As you all had heard, it’s regrettable that we didn’t arrive in time, but we still have a job to do.”

“Lieutenant Degurechaff, isn’t this load too heavy for one Flight?”

Sergeant Jones, who were loaned to Tanya by the Squadron Captain, advised caution. According to the latest updates from headquarters, they had lost contact with an allied mage, and judged him to have been shot down. That mage last reported visual on more than two squadron of mages. Considering the situation, they were in danger of being pursued, so retreating would be the correct call. They were dispatched as reinforcements, and with their rescue target downed, there was no need to proceed with the mission.

“Sergeant Jones, your opinion is correct on the most part, but the current situation is an exception.”

Speaking from common sense, this wasn’t an opponent they wanted to take on with a lone Flight. For Tanya, she would like to return back to base immediately if they were far enough away, but instead of shouldering the risk of being pursued

from behind as they flew, it would be better to seize the initiative and launch a pre-emptive attack.

“That’s right, we are at an disadvantage in terms of numbers... But we don’t need to wait obediently for the enemy to gather their forces.”

Taking out the enemy one by one was the basics of war.

“Considering the available intelligence, the enemy are probably two squadrons equipped for long distance travel.”

They might be elites, but with the heightened tensions and long distance travel, the enemy was probably exhausted. Not only did they have to break through the Empire’s defence, they had to conserve energy for the similarly long trek back to base as well, limiting the energy they could expend on combat. On the other hand, the Imperial mages could fight all out for defence, and just wait for friendly forces to pick them up after the endeavour. Once the artilleries were set, their bombardment would clean up the mess.

Of course, even if the enemy was exhausted, Tanya shouldn’t count on them for being careless. Yet one’s resolve could be betrayed by their body. The chance of victory wasn’t meagre. The main point was that the enemy had to split their forces to conduct a sweep through the battlefield. Their units were too spread out, and could only work together at flight level.

Although there would be consecutive battles, the mages from the Imperial military could go full throttle as they were the defenders. On the flip side, the Republican side had to operate on enemy territory with minimal support. If their numbers were even, the scale of victory would lean heavily towards the Imperials.

“Which is to say, this is a simple task of taking down an exhausted flight six times in a row.”

It might be haphazard, but they had enough supplies. Even though it was the bare minimum, they still had rear support.

One on six was a number which invoked despair, but there was a chance to win if it was one on one. If they inflicted enough casualties to the enemy despite their numerical disadvantage, headquarters wouldn't be able to fault them.

"All flight members take note. I will take on three flights. I will leave the rest to you. It should be a piece of cake."

It would be near impossible to decimate all enemy units, but if she could accumulate kills by working a bit harder, this would be a profitable situation. A good chance to show the higher-ups her competence.

The campaign was a failure, but thankfully, the joint artillery is right behind us, so we have some back up. After enquiring them, they informed us that they had saved some scatter shots for us. I thought that I could use the fatigue of the Corporal serving as my wingman as a roundabout excuse to reject the mission. I was just lamenting about this situation, but every cloud does have a silver lining.

But speaking of which—Tanya glanced at the face of her subordinate following right behind and started thinking. Even though she was nervous, Corporal Serbiakof's flying was steady. Contrary to her abilities, she was a conscript. She didn't sign up voluntarily, and was forced into service out of obligation. She didn't imagine a Corporal with such a background would be so eager to fight. Tanya didn't know if Serbiakof's motivation for taking on jobs beyond her pay grade were due to a sense of duty, patriotism or brotherly love, but she was a valuable human resource with a bright future.

"Flight Leader, you wish to hog the title of Ace?"

“Good question, Sergeant. It’s no big deal, I just need ten more kills to qualify for a bonus and time off. It is about time I take a vacation.”

If her kill breaks fifty, she would be granted special leave. Specifically speaking, two weeks time off, with a bonus and salary increment on top of that. She would be granted flexible work time, and the authority for limited autonomous action. Five kills meant one was an Ace; Fifty kills granted the title of Ace of Aces.

Unfortunately, my memory turns chaotic when I use the Type 95 prototype, and I also performed long distance sniping. So there were some kills that were unaccounted for. But even without those, I still have forty confirmed kills.

Most importantly, I would not be prosecuted for such war merits, this is wonderful. Things would be fine even after the war ends. Which means, killing a person is a crime, but massacring a group is commendable. This might sound contradictory normally, but is possible in economic theory.

“After that, I plan to use my vacation earned from the kills to go enjoy a trip for gourmet dishes. Sorry about that everyone, I will be eating graceful lunches in pubs.”

“How envious.”

Sergeant Jones nodded teasingly, while Corporal Serbiakof and the other team member smiled awkwardly, but that was the way it should be. After working hard to complete a job, it was “only right” to enjoy the fruits of your labours. The winners in life who earned a vacation could even enjoy delicious meals in the rear lines. They could also share a meal with the head honchos of enterprises. In short, this was the best environment to build social capital. *I already said this before, but this is truly wonderful.*

“Sorry, Sergeant Jones, but the prize will go to the swift.”

Schwarzkopf was worried about the lack of manpower, and half a flight was loaned to her from the squadron's meagre personnel. It might just be two people, but for mages, it was a significant force. It meant that the Empire could still spare the effort to show concern for the officer on site.

In other words, it was still possible to retreat to the rear lines for a vacation. If I don't go back now and become stuck here indefinitely, my future would definitely be spent in a joyous nursing home. I definitely don't want that. So winning the war would be my target, and I have to prepared for anything.

...Can we really win?

It's true that the Empire is a finely tuned war machine. Just like the Germany I knew, victory is a given in a fight between two nations. While it is still manageable for the Empire to fight on two fronts, given how powerful its current military strength is at, but there is no certainty in war.

After all, it is one nation against the world. Is this a world war, or a single country fighting against the rest of the world? Can such a war be won? To be honest, it will be difficult.

“If we win the war, I will enjoy myself to my heart's content.”

“Ara, and here I thought the Lieutenant is someone who enjoyed the despair of our defence line.”

...I can consider it if it will progress my career.

But frankly speaking, it is impossible for miracles to happen repeatedly. The Type 95 is the crystallization of a curse, and victory will not be certain even if I use something I don't intend on using.

“I am a soldier. If there is an order, I will do it.”

If there is an executive order, the public administrative staff can only carry it out dutifully. Similarly, military officers have to serve their nation loyally and fulfill their contract. I have no other choice but to fight in this war. Who would want to charge into a hail of bullets?— Tanya answered curtly.

“Please excuse my interruptions, Second Lieutenant. So you don't like the war too?”

It was a bit unexpected as Corporal Serbiakof joined the conversation between her superior officers with a curious expression.

“Of course, Corporal. I prefer a peaceful life. What about you, Sergeant Jones?”

“I think the same way too, Second Lieutenant!”

Jones gave a standard salute deftly, which looked amusing. A large part of the reason he did that was to soothe the other two members of the flight, which was a job well done. No wonder it was said in books that excellent NCOs were irreplaceable treasures.

“As I suspected. Alright, time to go through the agenda for the welcome party.”

After making this conclusion, Tanya ascended swiftly and prepared for battle. What was reverberating in her heart was her wish for a peaceful life, and her hatred

for the ones that disrupted it. Just *who would want to pick up a rifle and fight?*—
The wrath in her heart was intense.

Let catastrophe befall this cursed world. Or rather, let catastrophe befall everything except me. If that is impossible, just don't let me meet with misfortune.

Tanya flew in the sky as she muttered in her heart.

“What is your plan, Second Lieutenant?”

“Let's give them a warm welcome. Put the tabs for bullets and spells on me.”

Bullets were funded by the public, and wasting the budget would lower one's evaluation, but investing resources to increase productivity was part of running an operation. Entertainment expenses were billed to the company because of its necessity. This meant that if it was necessary, it's fine to “splurge as much as you need, and it won't be a problem if you produce results.” If mages could mass produce enemy corpses, no one would complain about them wasting bullets.

The only thing to worry about would be the stomachs of the finance officers. I will feel bad about making them worry so much. That might be so, but I hope the ones in charge could contribute by taking care of the mental health of the finance officers.

My job is to spend money to defeat the enemy; the task of the finance officer is to think of a way to raise the budget. Our mental wellbeing falls under the purview of professional support personnels. An ideal world where everyone contributes in their own way. We should offer thanks to how the study of economics predicts the result of working cohesively together and promotes an orderly distribution of work.

“Shall we check if they have their visas and passports?”

“Yes, let’s do that.”

That’s right, the rules of warfare shouldn’t nullify border control laws. If someone trespass the borders as determined by the Empire, they would need to go through entry inspections. That is careless of me, needing my subordinate to remind me of that.

“Let’s treat this as the signal to begin. How about having a match?”

“Hmmp, let’s compete in kills then. If you can beat me, I will offer the wine kept preciously by the Squadron Captain as the prize.”

I remembered seeing the Squadron Captain hiding a high grade wine secretly when I peeked into his tent. He must have gotten hold of it through cards, but it shouldn’t be difficult to get him to award the property of the squadron as a commendation for good performance. If that didn’t work, I will use more forceful means. It might not be much, for even though I am not old enough to drink, I can still appraise the value of wine.

“What should I do... Alright, if Lieutenant Degurechaff wins, I will give you my earnings for this entire day.”

“Hmm, that’s a good bet. Really good. I will take you on!”

Rhine Battlefront

The feeling of unsteadiness in the head, along with difficulty in maintaining consciousness; the current situation on hand was at a point where the officers could no longer care for the wellbeing of their troops.

Not only that, even though they were already at their limits and could barely maintain consciousness, optical decoys were still deployed in the end as the squadron retreated while performing evasive maneuvers at a level far exceeding safety regulations.

Despite the fact that they managed to preserve a bare minimum chain of command, as an elite squadron belonging to the Republican Military, they were completely toyed with by a single magician.

"Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!"

The emergency distress signal when encountering sudden enemy contact was spontaneously raised. This was the first time they had heard their Front Theatre Air Controller making such alarming cries.

"Break! Break!"

The commander immediately issued instructions for the squadron to scatter. After all, no commanding officer would be foolish enough to allow their troops to be grouped up and taken down from afar. However, even though the order was timely issued, it was not flawlessly executed. The upper portion of a squadron member suddenly exploded during the momentary confusion caused by being unable to spot the enemy's presence.

"Sean!?"

"Bandit! Angels 12¹!!"

"Angels 12!?"

The figure of the enemy opponent was finally detected after tracing the trajectory of the previous attack, yet the faces of the soldiers soon turned speechless the moment they realized where it came from. An altitude of 12,000 feet, a height which completely shattered the conventional flying limit known to Aerial Mages.

Before even mentioning the oxygen level at that height was roughly 60% of the ground level, the saturation of mana was another issue which could not be disregarded. It wasn't without reasons as to why the maximum practical flying limit for Aerial Mages was 6000 feet.

¹ **Angel** and **Bandit** are military terms. **Angels** meaning altitude in thousands of feet (e.g., Angels 12 is 12,000 ft). **Bandit**, An aircraft identified as enemy, in accordance with theater ID criteria. The term does not necessarily imply direction or authority to engage.

"Impossible!? Could it be a fighter plane!?"

"God dammit, it's not a mistake."

Although initially there were suspicions that it could have been an enemy fighter aircraft, but as expected, no mistakes were made. Reactions caused from the emission of mana particles as well as the lights reflected were cleanly picked up on the observation machine; without a doubt it was an enemy magician.

The insufficient concentration of oxygen in the atmosphere, the extreme drop in the external temperature, along with the saturation of mana as well as various other effects of high altitude on the human body; although it might be difficult to believe, it appeared as if the enemy mage was able to conquer these problems while still maintaining full combat capability. From the flight posture alone it seemed as if the opponent was simply having a leisurely walk in the park. One couldn't help but to gain the impression that this figure was the embodiment of the current might of the Imperial Military.

"Ascend! We're ascending! We will engage the enemy at altitude 8000!"

The entire squadron was already exhausted. Not only had they expended a considerable amount of energy previously when suppressing enemy observation units, but the burden of maintaining altitude for extended period of time had further taken a significant toll on their body. It was common sense when two sides of equal forces engage in battle, the side that was more rested and more spirited would hold the advantage.

The aerial mages hailing from the Empire were famed for being the elites among the elites whereas the Republican military was forced to make up for the lack of quality through quantity. Much less that the current opponent was clearly at a level far beyond the norm; even if they were to attack at their peak state most likely they would still incur heavy losses. Furthermore, the action of attacking an opponent at an altitude of 12,000 feet could almost be considered as an impossible task to accomplish to begin with.

"Captain, that's a bit..."

"We have no other options!"

In theory, between aerial mages and military aircrafts, it was the mages which possessed greater combat potential.

However, that was only when limiting it to altitudes below 6000 feet. Although aerial mages were capable of using magic, they were still humans made of flesh and blood. If they were to engage in battles at extreme altitudes, they would only end up being target practice for the aircrafts.

"...No wonder the AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System Personnel) would panic like that."

"I agree. That's just...way too excessive."

It was a situation that could only be described as out of the norm. Hence, it was within reasons as to why the AWACS had previously panicked. After all, according to the standard aviation regulations, it was not possible for Aerial Mages to go beyond an altitude of 6800 feet. Rather, it should be considered as completely impossible. In order to efficiently conduct warfare using both the operation orb and a combat rifle, 6000 feet was the limit. Even in the very unlikelihood that the Aerial Mage had emanated from Highland Regiments, their combat potential would have drastically diminished as they go above 7000 feet.

At an altitude of 12,000 feet, it could be considered as an entirely different world where even aircrafts were required to include oxygen supply in order to prevent pilots from experiencing blackouts. The amount of oxygen in the atmosphere at that level was simply too little. Unless it was an emergency requiring extreme evasive maneuvering, no sane pilot would want to climb to such heights, not to mention to conduct battle from there.

Even if it was for the sake of taking down an enemy, the chances of surviving the endeavor afterwards was slim beyond slim. However, this time it was the exception.

"If we cannot suppress this opponent, our ground forces will most likely face annihilation."

"You're right... We have to do this."

Even in aerial warfare conducted between magicians, getting suppressed from above have been proven to be fatal.

Therefore, they had to ascend. Or at the very least get close enough to be able to shoot back at the enemy, or else they would remain as targets to be shot down.

Regardless of whether it was to retreat or to fight, nothing would be achieved unless they ascended. However, fleeing was not an option. They had to buy enough time in order to allow for the ground troops to complete their retreat, otherwise the situation where both they themselves and the ground forces being annihilated could potentially occur. From the very beginning they knew they had no other option.

"This is an all-out war. Don't even think about retreating!"

They will fight until all of their mana have been depleted. Most importantly, they have to get revenge for Sean. The enemy must not be allowed to return home alive.

[Attack! Don't stop attacking even if you die!]

An overwhelming amount of determination could be felt from the words uttered by the commander, it could be considered as both an order and a warcry at the same time.

It will either be the complete annihilation of the enemy or the death of the entire squadron. Only two paths were left to be walked.

"Bravo, engage!"

Flight Bravo also began to engage with the enemy. The vulnerability of the situation that they were currently in couldn't help but draw out the desire for one to curse at God. Just the thought alone that additional enemy reinforcements could soon appear on top of having to face off against such an overwhelming opponent, the urge in wanting to swear quickly began to surface from within their hearts.

"...Dear Lord!"

However, the scene that was displayed using the long distance scrying spell was beyond what they had initially imagined. After having ran through the opponent's mana signature against the database library, a reality far worse than having to face off against enemy reinforcements was mercilessly revealed before their eyes.

The opponent they were facing against was a 「Registered Magician」, more commonly known as Named. The world for aerial mages was very small.

Squadrons usually only consisted of twelve members. Even for the formulation of an Aerial Mage Wing, there would typically only be up to thirty-six members.

That was the kind of world it was. One would only need to take down five opponent magicians to be considered as an Ace, and once that counter reached fifty, they would naturally then be regarded as an Ace of Aces. A threshold is formed when six or more aces join a unit or when an individual achieved a counter of thirty or more. Once this threshold is breached, the unit or individual would usually end up becoming 「registered」 in the databases of foreign nations and be regarded as a threat on the strategic level.

Named ones completely dominate the battlefield. The only viable methods to counter them was to either completely overwhelm them with numbers or to send out an equal amount of opposing Named. To the soldiers and officers on the battlefield, nothing more can be as satisfying as knowing that friendly Named mages would be assisting them from above; their presence alone is enough to become the mental support for an entire regiment. It was exactly because of this, unique aliases have been assigned to enemy Named as a way to provide caution for future encounters.

In the eyes of the Republican military, the 「Registered Magician: alias "Devil of Rhine"」 can be considered as nothing but a disaster. As long as an enemy mage possessed enough potential to be regarded as a threat on the strategic level, they will be registered in the military database, and within this, the Devil of Rhine was considered by the majority as the number one opponent that they did not wish to encounter. It has only been a mere two months since the confirmation of its existence, yet the amount of kills the Devil managed to accumulate have already exceeded sixty.

What was especially frightening was his skills at utilizing heavy arcane-based spells such as spatial detonation, as well as the uncanny accuracy of his long-distance photon-based precision attacks. More than half of the troops that encountered the Devil met their end just from falling for the "Decoy Fishing" tactic, a strategy commonly employed by sniping units. The worst part of it was that many of the mages that were wounded during engagements ended up dying just as they make it back to base.

Even though aerial mages were treated as precious military resources and received preferential treatment over others, they were still unable to survive in the end. Not only did this result in a significant waste of the limited medical resources and facilities, it further tied up the hands of the attending doctors, causing many of the ground forces that were in need of medical attention to suffer due to the shortage of staff.

Furthermore, the loss ratio of mages had almost reached to a point where it was beginning to affect the overall scale of the entire military operation on a strategic level. From this alone, one could realize the current absurdity of the situation, where a single magician was able to disrupt the overall battle plan laid out by the military. What other terms could be as fitting as to describe this magician apart from labelling him as the very incarnation of a Devil? No matter what, he was definitely an opponent that had to be brought down as soon as possible.

Naturally, it was impossible for them to directly engage with the opponent at a height of 12,000 ft, but as long as they reached an altitude of roughly 8000 ft, it was possible to attack back. What was important was that even though their side might not be at their peak, or rather, far from being at their peak, they at least had the absolute advantage in numbers. Furthermore, the opponent was currently flying at a height of 12,000 ft. No matter how much of an irregular he may be, it definitely wasn't a feat that could be accomplished without suffering from repercussions.

From Tanya's perspective, it was definitely an unexpected move for the enemy to choose to charge at her while endlessly shouting like maniacs.

They were already heavily fatigued and were scattered about. Thinking that they had already lost their combat potential, she had thus opted to snipe them down one by one from afar, but it appeared that this ended up being nothing but wishful thinking from her end. Although this sudden assault launched by the enemy appeared to be quite reckless and was without any plans, it was actually the most effective move they could have made under that situation.

"The Devil of Rhine! Today we will definitely bring you down!"

".....This should be the first time we've met, right?"

However, regardless of Tanya's bewilderment as to why they would react that way to her, the intense killing intent expressed by the enemy could be clearly be felt upon her body.

While feeling genuinely puzzled by the unnatural conviction displayed by the enemy, Tanya continued to analyze the overall situation of the battle. The movements of the opponents were unexpectedly fast. Furthermore, they were highly irregular. Precision-based attacks would no longer be optimal.

Therefore, it would be best to switch to either explosion-based tactics that were capable of targeting an entire area, or to utilize spatially-targeted homing attacks. *Target locked-on. Movement velocity adjusted.* Unconsciously, Tanya ended up being guided by the Ellinium Type 95 Orb when selecting the most optimal attack. *Neural Linkage established, ion concentration normal, meta-motor cortex parameters updated. System, all green.*

—Nicht!¹

Suddenly, various mana signals both faint and strong could be felt directed at Tanya's surroundings. The signal types included those belonging to the spatially detonated spell categories which were area-targeted and could not be visually detected, only to detonate the moment they reached the specified spatial coordinates. *Even though the opponents had clearly closed the distance to strike back, for me to not have realized in time due to being distracted by their communication, it really was the worst possible moment for me to be making such a critical mistake.*

Alarms began to sound in the back of Tanya's head. Without a thought, the magic-current within the core of the Ellinium Type 95 Orb was immediately redirected to focus on the process for mana materialization. Even though she was aware that doing so would cause a loss of balance, mana was still poured into the Orb without any constraint, all the while at the same time automated evasive maneuvering was being performed. Just as Tanya had barely flew out of the away, the previous location she was in immediately lit up with the lights resulting from mana-induced explosions and barrages which had descended from the sky.

¹ **Nicht**, German for "No".

Mixed amongst those bursting lights were a considerable number of explosions from spatially-detonated spells. The shockwaves caused by them alone were strong enough to jostle anyone that came near.

“Tsh... ..what should I do now?”

Originally, Tanya had suspicions that the enemy might have belonged to a Highland division, but who would have imagined that they were capable of ignoring the need to adapt to a higher altitudes and were able to directly levitate to a height of 8000 ft. Even when considering the distance between them in terms of height, Tanya had already entered their attacking range. What made it worse was that the opponents had the advantage in numbers. If this was all planned from the beginning then it would seem that the enemy was much more capable than she had initially estimated. Believing that she might have underestimated her opponents, Tanya immediately employed Optical Decoys as a precaution.

At the same time while casting the spell, Tanya performed various maneuvers in order to prevent her flight path from being predicted. However, even after having scattered a number of illusory clones away from her position, the aim of the enemy were still directed at her real body—*Just how are they capable of performing Regulated Shooting at such a fast pace?*

"He managed to avoid them all? What a monster!"

Such a noisy bunch, for them to be shouting this loudly on the open transmission line like that. No, could this have been done on purpose? Are they trying to take advantage of their superior numbers? Most likely they wanted to distract me over the radio so that I would lose my concentration, but I will not fall for such tricks again.

The group-oriented combat style called Regulated Shooting is one of the few methods that countered the Aviation Forces of the Empire which relied more on the individual skills of their aerial mages.

In particular, the Republican military have always heavily depended on using numerical advantage in order to compete against the mages of the Imperial military. Amongst the Republican forces currently deployed on this battlefield, the only group of mages that were capable of conducting such precise aerial warfare at such an advanced level would be the Named Squadron that I was previously warned of.

After comparing their mana signatures against the Database Library, I annoyingly discovered that my initial hypothesis was right all along. It was the ultra-troublesome bunch that the combat instructors back at the Empire's Training Department would constantly warn the new recruits about when giving lectures on opponent tactics. *This has clearly gone beyond that of my salary.*

"Alerting CP, enemy squadron is Named. I repeat, enemy squadron is Named."

"CP received. Reinforcements are on their way. You do not need to forcefully engage."

The instructions I received this time could truly be described as praiseworthy.

As long as I was not ordered to die, I would be happy. However, in the military world, "courage," and having a "loud voice" are the type of qualities that were well-received by the upper echelons. It was the kind of organization that respected valor over timid compliancy. Such values and practices could only ever be described as abnormal in any other organization. Yet here, it was the only way in order to make yourself stand out. There was no other options to choose.

"Acknowledged. However, this is my battlefield."

Although I did not wish to do this, but my battle achievements and evaluation would have plummeted had I not uttered such words. Thinking back, I really feel amazed at how the Kwantung Army¹ was able to raise their self-image through sheer boasting. However, it was definitely the right approach to follow in order to distinguish yourself from others. All self-proclaimed patriots are hypocrites.

True patriots demonstrate their patriotism through actions instead of words, but in order to stand out, one would need to do both. Patriotism really is the best tool to achieve recognition in the military, and as a tool, one should never hesitate to use it.

¹ The **Kwantung Army** was an army group of the Imperial Japanese Army in the first half of the 20th century. It became the largest and most prestigious command in the IJA.

"Regardless of whether the opponents are from the Federation or the Republic, their fate were sealed the moment they set foot on the Empire's territory; I will annihilate them all without any thought, such was the mission I was entrusted."

The Ellinium Type 95 is a type of Orb which corroded the mind when utilizing it at full power. As a side effect, the user would involuntarily end up praising the mysterious existence X which proclaims itself to be God, such was the nightmarish drawback which could not be avoided. The only slight positive aspect this time was that I could make use of the doctrine employed by the Kwantung army and turn this whole thing into a blatant sideshow for an effective demonstration of my patriotism.

Looking back, there really must be something wrong with the mindset of the entire military for such ill-advised strategies to end up becoming so effective. It was entirely because of this, that the current military ended up producing nothing but idiots that crave only for battle.

Logically speaking, soldiers should be the last ones on Earth to desire for war. This way we would be able to happily receive salary while doing nothing.

"Confirming spatial coordinates, the flight path for each individual target has been calculated, Chamber Magic replenishment is proceeding as normal."

The opponents are trying to utilize their numerical advantage in order to hunt me down. Against the aerial mages of the Republic, attacking them individually will not be effective. I will most likely end up defeated by their sheer numbers if I try. After all, the opponents are soldiers that take pride in their teamwork.

I was rather lucky to have been able to reduce their combat potential at the start using just long-distance sniping. Such opportunities will most likely not happen again. If that's the case, I will have to switch my tactics. In short, I just need to treat these guys as a single target instead. It will be like giant slaying.

The need to carefully take aim will no longer be required, I just have to target the entire area.

"Alerting CP, please notify the vicinity for incoming spatial detonations."

"CP received. A spatial detonation warning will be issued."

The Ellinium Type 95 is an operation orb capable of utilizing four cores at the same time through synchronization, and furthermore has the ability to store mana.

If utilized properly, it is possible to enhance the destructive power of explosion-based spells such that it could cause interference to an entire battlefield. Needless to say, to achieve this would require increasing the output of the orb to its maximum. Without a doubt it would also trigger certain misfortunes to the user.

"Sergeant Jones! Ready the assault!"

Not only would it result in an uncontrollable explosion that would damage all within the vicinity regardless of friend or foe, it would further cause a large-scale, area-wide unconstrained mana interfering noises to manifest in the entire surrounding. The aftereffects of the explosion would even limit the visibility of the battlefield, isolating individual soldiers from their team. Under such circumstances, it will be extremely difficult for well-organized group oriented strategies to be executed. It would be the absolute worst situation to conduct group-battle in.

The Training Department had the following opinion on this tactic, which was, "apart from using it for self-destructive purposes, there was no other useful application. However, if employed in situations where it was an individual versus an organized unit, it can cause significant disruptions and turn the situation into 'one versus multiple individuals.'" *As such, the final evaluation it received was that for group combat, it was terrible, don't use it, but if it was for individual versus group situations, it can be a surprisingly effective tactic which could to be considered for use.*

"Return, intruders of the Republic. The place where we are belongs to the Empire. This is our sky, and our land."

Blatantly professing my nationalism to the surroundings, I hoped to receive positive evaluations for doing this.

Coincidentally, those who are religious were also well-received by the military, so I might as well make use of the curse laid out by Existence X and distinguish myself from others. I will just have to endure it this round. Even though my freedom and dignity will suffer because of it, I did not forget to let waste the bitter emotions I was feeling and fully took advantage to reveal my feelings.

"If thou come bearing malevolence against the Empire, then to God we shall pray to."

The enemy aerial mages began to spread apart. Forming into a cross-like formation, avoiding my line of fire while changing their tactics to that of attrition warfare. The distance between each member was carefully calculated to be longer than the blast radius of typical explosion-based spells.

"O Lord, may your benevolence protect us from the wickedness of man. O Lord, may your righteousness grant us strength to defeat those that intrude our nation."

For them to be capable of performing suppression fire even after having gone through all those intensive maneuvers while at an altitude like this, just how gung-ho can these bunch of lunatics be? Good grief, if they're this crazy for battle, why not just split into two sides and fight it out between themselves?

Do they really have to drag innocent bystanders in? Have they not been taught that it's not good to be a nuisance to others? In a matter of fact, something must have gone wrong during their childhood upbringing. A good education and upbringing is indispensable to a child's future, please don't make light of it.

Or could it be that they're doing this for the same reasons like myself—seeking career advancement through battle? Wait, hold on. If that was the case then wouldn't it be better to conduct this all via a peaceful negotiation where the common interest for both sides could be explored... ...For a rational and business-oriented person like me to have almost forgotten about such possibilities, just what has been happening to me? Have I finally started to lose my rationality to the cruelty of war?

Personal interest should always be placed before everything else, and to achieve that is through negotiation. If the opponents were to have been blasted to smithereens before any dialogue were to have taken place, then it would be impossible to conduct any negotiations.

By the time Tanya became aware of this, her mind was filled with regrets of how easily she had lost herself to the tempo of war. Senseless killing was never something that she particularly enjoyed doing; therefore, as long as there were no personal benefits to be gained, it was something that Tanya perceived to be

completely pointless. Indeed, it's not like this was a zero-sum game, so there shouldn't be any reasons preventing one from establishing cooperative relations with others.

If that was the case, rather than seriously slaughtering each other, it would be much better to turn it into fixed matches instead. To go from a world of senseless killing into a world of reason, such a win-win relationship should be the desired outcome for both sides.

Of course, it doesn't have to be done too exorbitantly. Similar to how economists were able to determine through statistics that the Japanese national sports were filled with nothing but fixed matches, even though the hidden truth would one day be revealed, but by then the war would have hopefully been long over. Furthermore, it wasn't as if economists during war periods would have the time to determine whether or not a war was real or fixed.

"Save us from the invasion of the heretics. O God, grant me the strength to slay our enemies."

I mustered my efforts to continue spouting meaningless phrases while making it seem as if I was initiating a spell. This way I could temporarily prevent CP from uncovering my true intention. If this goes well, I could seize the moment when radio waves are down due to mana inference and conduct negotiations with the opposing party.

The situation at hand was slowly progressing towards the optimal moment. Being aware of this fact, Tanya briefly debated in her mind on the next step to take. *Now should be the time to send my message right?* And finally made her resolution.

Could the opponent side also be looking for an opportunity to open the window for discussion, to allow both sides the chance to reach an agreement? As a fellow member of society, one should never allow themselves to be bound by preconception. Perhaps in the view of the Republican soldiers, the soldiers of the Empire were to be understood as enemies that must not be trusted.

One must never judge others by appearances alone. Understanding their inner-self

is also an essential aspect that must not be ignored. It is important to respect the personalities of others, for each one is unique and irreplaceable.

Even if we are currently amidst a war, when facing against opponents that are open for negotiation, it is important to show them your sincerity. Needless to say, negotiating with the enemy will no doubt get you court-martialed. Abandoning the battle is equivalent to fleeing before the enemy, what would be waiting for you at the end are the faces of the firing squad.

However, as a good hearted person with a strong conscience, if it is possible to avoid a meaningless battle, even at the risk of being labeled as a traitor to the Empire, it is something which I am willing to perform. As long as the opponents are those that are willing to communicate, I am willing to forsake my opportunities for promotion and vacation. When the time comes, I will just have to re-earn them by defending myself from the attacks of other battle-crazed maniacs.

The most important thing to note was that the risk and the amount of labor involved was clearly greater than that of my current salary. It was the kind of work which can almost be considered as charity work to which I have no obligation of doing.

If the opponents are unwilling to communicate, then I will regrettably have to take them down, and enjoy a nice vacation eating delicious food back at home. Even though it was unfortunate that I am not at an age where I can consume wine, but I have heard of a famous sautéed fish dish which they sell in certain districts near the area where I lived. I am very much looking forward to sample that.

“I hereby declare to all that are present, you are currently intruding upon the Empire’s territory.”

No matter what, let’s first start off with a few neutral statements to get the conversation going.

“We will spend every effort in order to defend our nation, because the lives of our people rests behind our backs.”

The fundamental obligation of the military was to protect the people of its nation. Although exceptions always existed, such as the Bouryoku Souchi¹ or the special forces under the direct command of the Emperor, generally speaking, the primary responsibility for soldiers was still to protect their country. However, there were also cases like Prussia where it was the military that was in charge of the nation instead of the typical way around, so it might not be so wise as to generalize the whole thing, but normally speaking, that was the general gist behind the role of a soldier.

“Answer me. Just why do you desire to invade the Empire, to invade our homeland?”

I seemingly issued a condescending kind of inquiry, taking the initiative to establish communication. A question of this level can be passed off as just an arbitrary remark and allow the opposite side to respond without raising any suspicions.

Well then, how do they plan on responding? In the end, even though expectations were raised, the responses I received were filled with nothing but curses and insults. *Are these guys really just nothing but a bunch of animalistic, battle-crazed maniacs?* Feeling puzzled by their responses, Tanya couldn't help but start to question the current mental state of the enemy.

Could it be they weren't the kind of people that I had initially thought them to be—the rationally minded, economical and business-oriented modern entrepreneurs that pursued mutually beneficial relationships? Or could it be that they too had their rationalities engulfed by the madness of war? If that was the case, it really was regrettable. However, at the same time this also meant that I will have to continue on accompanying them in this meaningless battle. It really was the worst outcome one could have hoped for.

Suddenly I felt the urge to request additional overtime pay along with extra compensation for being placed in an excessively dangerous and hazardous working

¹ The rough translation of **Bouryoku Souchi** is something along the lines of a violence squad.

environment. The only thing that was stopping me from doing so was because I didn't know where to lodge the applications. It wasn't written anywhere within the rules and regulations.....which almost made me feel like as if I was a child that was trying to raise pointless fuss because things didn't go my way; it wouldn't be strange to say that I feel as if I wanted to cry but no tears would come out.

“Warning. To all troops within this battle zone, please be on alert for the incoming influx of mana-induced interference noise.”

As planned, CP issued a warning according to my prior instructions. I have also accumulated enough magic power for now. Now then, if these guys really were the kind of businessmen I had initially taken them to be, without a doubt they would choose any value over the numerical number zero.

In other words, as long as the radio waves have not deteriorated to the point where all contacts have been lost, it was possible some of the people were simply overly-cautious and did not wish to take risks in exposing their thoughts. If they were the kind of reasonable people like that, would it not be likely that should they manage to survive the incoming explosion, they would then choose a more reasonable solution than what they had previously planned?

At least, if it was me, that's what I would pick. If that was the case, then I will need to quickly end it and wrap things up. Setting aside all hesitation and unnecessary thoughts, and concentrate on the current task at hand; muster all of my efforts in controlling the accumulated mana, and willingly allow foreign thoughts to enter my mind.

“O Saints, let us believe in the grace of our Lord, for we who knew not of fear.”

A sense of liberation could felt as I forcefully released the mana which had been gathered. Even though the feeling of having all of your mana sucked out from every cell of your body would normally cause one to cry out due to the excessive

amount of pain, it was prevented this time around by the curse of the Ellinuim Type 95. The curse forcefully turned pain into euphoria, a feeling which was difficult to describe, yet nevertheless caused no small amounts of discomfort.

A unique blend of joy and pain forcefully assaulting your head, it was the worst kind of feeling if one had to describe it.

“Oooh, lament not of our fate, for the Lord hath not forsaken us!!”

The feeling of euphoria running throughout my entire body, along with a sense of having my freedom deprived, has finally reached a level which I could no longer tolerate. If it was possible, I would have immediately opened my mouth and cursed out loud, yet I could not do so as most likely what have would come out instead would have been nothing but praises to the “Lord.” Although I hate having to admit this, but the one good thing those annoying communists did right was to treat religion like a type of addiction and completely banned all practices of it.

In the views of the Chicago School of Economics, narcotics should be considered as just another form of commodity which can be regulated using the economy.

Although having said that, the main problem is that the “narcotic” I am using simply isn’t something I can just quit anytime I want. If not handled properly, I will most likely end up worse than dying. It really is a nuisance which knows no bounds. Looks like even the Chicago School did not take into account drugs which would kill you the moment you try to leave them.

“In the distant end of our journey, we shall reach the Promised Land.”

At that moment, a process similar to the vaporization of a thermobaric explosion was initiated. Mana in the purest condensed form was rapidly discharged at a rate which could not be fathomed. Explosions began to formulate through the heating of the discharged mana, and as they dispersed and made contact with the open air, a wide area unconstrained mana-induced explosion was initiated. The drastic changes in atmospheric pressure could bring on acute pulmonary atelectasis and

lung congestion, and furthermore causes the already thin concentration of oxygen level in the air to drop below to a critical level.

Experiencing hypoxia and carbon monoxide poisoning at an altitude of 8000 feet would cause even the most well-trained aerial mages to black out and fall. In unlucky situations where if one were to somehow barely hold-on and maintain their consciousness, they would soon experience horrendous amount of pain in an unimaginable way. This torturous experience was brought on by a series of acute pulmonary atelectasis and carbon monoxide poisoning, coupled with the various symptoms caused from the drastic drop in arterial blood-oxygen level within the body.

“Tshh, ... geho ... ahek.”

Even Tanya who was outside the effective range of the attack experienced difficulty in breathing due to the lack of oxygen. It was hard to imagine the situation of those caught within. Should they somehow manage to survive, the most they could do would be to barely maintain their altitude, and that might not even last much longer due to the phenomenon formed from the aftereffects of unconstrained mana-induced explosion, causing a widespread influx of mana interference noise.

This not only caused disruptions to wireless communication, but even made it difficult to maintain sustained spells like flight, making it impossible for the battle to continue. Although the low visibility which arose from the smoke clouds could still make things troublesome, it was easy to imagine the outcomes of those caught within a direct blast radius of the spell.

“To the forces of Republican Army, the outcome of this battle has been decided.”

Therefore, Tanya attempted to persuade the remaining opponents to surrender. Although whether or not there would even be survivors was a thing to be wondered at, it wouldn't hurt to at least give it a try.

Well, if no survivors were to be found, it wouldn't be bad to take the credit for annihilating an entire squadron and enjoy a nice vacation break back at the capital.

“If you are willing to surrender, our army will follow the Hague Convention¹ and guarantee your rights as captives.”

For the Republican army which relied on numerical advantage to overwhelm their opponents, they possessed a strong belief that such strategies could also prevail against the Named forces of the Empire. However, due to the rarity of Named and their strategic value, they were rarely deployed except during critical battles, causing their fame on the battlefronts to be immense but elusive.

The 106th and 107th Reconnaissance Mage Squadrons of the 42nd Aerial Mage Group belonging to the 4th Aerial Mage Division were also one of the immensely well-known elite units on the battlefield. Or at least, until recently.

“Now then, let us commence the meeting in regards to the recent annihilation of the 106th and 107th Reconnaissance Mage Squadrons.”

According to their initial calculation, the main forces of the Imperial Army which contained Named mages were deployed at the frontlines against the Federation, hence, could not be re-mobilized within a certain time period. Thus it was almost impossible to encounter scenarios where their troops would be annihilated by enemy forces consisting of elites lead by Named.

However, such events still occurred. Furthermore, it was at the hands of a single magician, even though their side held an overwhelming advantage in numbers. If one were to hear of such tales, they would undoubtedly wonder whether or not they have misheard.

“Both the 106th and 107th Squadron, when carrying out their mission in suppressing enemy observatory mages, made contact with opponent reinforcements.”

Due to the necessity of repelling long distance aggression, enemy Named forces were ordered to takeoff. After all, it was a difficult task to entrust to any other troops. However, the fact that they were able to deal significant damage despite their severe lack of numbers turned it into a situation that most likely impacted the overall state of the war.

¹ The LN listed it as Treaty of Worms (ヴォルムス陸戦条約) but the English wiki article didn't make too much sense so we switched to the Hague Convention.

For the attending military officers that understood of this fact, they couldn't help but to put on a solemn expression.

“These are summaries of reports collected from the operation orbs retrieved after the battle, as well as accounts taken from the survivors.”

However, the expressions of the attending Magic Officers in charge of data analysis were even more somber than others, due to having already analyzed the information and recordings beforehand.

In regards to the inquiries made to the survivors, although there were some difficulties due to the extent of the injuries suffered, the contents collected so far were already shocking to hear.

Were it not collected from the few remaining survivors that had gone through ordeals of life and death, the contents of their recounts most likely would not have been believed. No, it should be said as *not willing* to be believed.

“...As such, first, please take a look at these recordings taken during the battle.”

[Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!]

This was the emergency distress signal used when coming into contact with the enemy. For the Front Threatre Air Controller, who was supposed to remain calm and clear-headed throughout all stages of the engagement, to sound the alert while losing his cool like that, such an incident might have been laughed at if it was done by a rookie soldier, but for a veteran like him it was very unusual. He was also the first to report 106th's annihilation as well as having issued a general order of retreat. It was thanks to him that the survivors of the 106th and 107th squadrons were able to barely make it back from the battlefield.

[Break! Break!]

Within the noise-filled screen, displayed the figures of soldiers quickly obeying the issued command. For the Aerial Mage Officers who had viewed the recordings beforehand, even now they found themselves in disbelief with the scenes that followed after.

The data logged at that moment, recorded a value far exceeding the maximum known distance for long range optical-based precision sniping.

The 106th squadron immediately performed evasive maneuvering.

[Sean!]

Due to the drastic changes in their flight trajectory, the shakiness of the screen reached an unaccountable new height. Even within this short time period, several soldiers have already been shot down from the sky.

[Bandit! Angel 12!!]

[Angel 12!?!]

An attack from an altitude of 12000 ft. Such a feat could truly be described as difficult to believe and to comprehend.

Although this information has already been relayed to the capital via emergency channels, should the matter that magicians of the Imperial Army were able to reach an altitude twice that of the current flying limit were discovered to be true, this would completely nullify the combat potential of all other aerial mages.

“...Impossible.”

No one was sure who exactly had uttered that phrase. However, it precisely reflected the feelings of those present in the headquarters as a whole. The numerical digit of 12000, this value caused their brains to ache. Such a figure simply should not exist in this day and age.

In a matter of fact, the attending staff officers at the time also wondered if it might have been an enemy fighter aircraft that had appeared instead. However, the opponent was undoubtedly a magician.

Following a series of complex optical processing methods, the resulting images revealed the standard rifle used by the Imperial Army along with unknown mana signatures emanating from the enemy's operation orb.

Due to the distance, it was impossible to clearly observe the features of the enemy soldier. Although the figure was noted to be of particularly small stature, it had a composure like that of a ruler, leisurely cruising through the sky, as if all obstacles were useless in front of its presence.

Right after, confirmation that the opponent being a 「Registered Magician」 was made by the 106th squadron. What made it worse was that the opponent was a newly Named magician that had just emerged during the start of this war. All details regarding the magician were unknown. Forget about countermeasures, even

knowledge of the common tactics and spells employed by the enemy were unknown.

Although headquarters had been kicking the butts of those at the Intelligence Bureau in order to get them to reinvestigate, information coming from the frontlines had already become diluted with nothing but rumors. Such as tales of a lone enemy soldier taking down an entire squadron, or rumors of a magician flying at an impossible altitude, etc.

This was the frontlines after all. While it was expected for there to be a certain amount of confusion in the accuracy of the incoming reports, the abnormality of the opponent this time caused a delay in verifying the validity of those information. Letting such an opportune window of timing go to waste was rather regrettable.

“This goddamn Devil of Rhine!”

“Stop that, Captain Cargill. Who is this Devil of Rhine?”

“An unknown enemy Named. We can only identify him at this stage through his magic signature. ”

The face of the intelligence officer when questioned began to turn blue. “Only able to identify via magic signature,” in other words, nothing else was known. This was almost the same as confessing straight up to the other military officers present that those at the Intelligence Bureau were completely incompetent.

An ample amount of information can be obtained from analyzing just the data collected from the operation orbs taken during battle. In other words, having no information would mean either the intelligence officers had neglected their duties or that none of the operation orbs were able to record any useful data.

“Have the recordings been properly analyzed?”

Naturally, the Chief of Staff in charge of the current session asked the question that everyone had been wanting to hear, which practically meant; *are you bastards so incompetent that even the basics of your job couldn't be properly handled?*

“Regarding the cores of the operation orbs recovered from those slain on the battlefield, analysis has been completed on seventeen of them so far. As for the

orbs of the survivors, all of them have been analyzed.”

However, the response from the Intelligence Bureau was concise and clear. They really did complete their task. Furthermore, they were also the first ones that had sent out the report detailing the annihilation brought on by an unknown enemy mage.

A special investigation squad was even formed, deliberately letting the enemy opponents shoot them down so as they could retrieve the corpses of fallen magicians. At the end, they were able to recover the majority of the operation orbs, as well as perform investigations on the remains in order to uncover as many details as possible regarding the incident.

.....However, nothing useful was uncovered.

Despite the mountains of evidence that indicated the existence of the enemy magician, no other information could be obtained.

“.....And after all that, the only information uncovered was the magic signature of the enemy? Just how did this happen?”

“Almost every person that came close to the enemy perished. Whereas the majority of the survivors were shot down from afar.”

Every mage that came into close contact with the opponent had their entire body scorched and blown to smithereens. The protective outer shells of the retrieved operation orbs were further melted, damaging the cores. For conventional weapons to reach this level of destructive power would require either the equivalent of direct hits by heavy artillery or roughly one ton of heavy explosives.

For there to exist a magician capable of both overwhelming their opponents at close range as well as being proficient at conducting long range, precision-based attacks, the Intelligence Bureau had already classified him as a strategic-level threat. Although the mana signature of this magician has yet to be validated, it had already been registered on the military database.

The alias “Devil of Rhine” was given due to the hatred and fear they felt for an

opponent that couldn't be seen on the battlefield. After all, it has only been two months since the first verified appearance of this Devil, yet if recorded correctly, the confirmed number of casualties already reached more than sixty.

Due to the appearance of enemy Named forces, headquarters from the frontline had urgently requested for a counter subjugation team.

“Continuing on, this is the miraculous recording recovered from the operation orb of a deceased member of the 106th squadron, moments before it lost its functionality.”

Projected from within the screens, was the figure of a lone enemy opponent gracefully avoiding the concentrated fire of an entire squadron. Despite the sheer amount of spells directed at the enemy, none of them seemed to have landed even close, making the viewers wonder just where in the world were their side aiming at. What further made the scene unbelievable was the manner in the way the opponent avoided the incoming projectiles, which could only be described as elegant and calm.

“.....It's almost ...as if a dance is being conducted?”

Mesmerized by the movements displayed within the screen, one couldn't help but to murmur quietly in admiration.

As the brightness of the spells intensified to a maximum, countless rays of lights could be seen pouring down from the sky. Yet amongst this intensive barrage of spells, the figure of the opponent could still be observed gracefully dancing within this sparkling world of lights. As irritating as it might sound, not a single spell seemed to have landed.

Although it was unclear who exactly had given this name, but the alias “Devil of Rhine” fit very well with the displayed scene. To be capable of slipping through the concentrated fire of an entire squadron in such a calm and carefree manner, no matter how one thought of it, it was beyond the norm.

“Is it due to mobility issues that caused our technique of Regulated Shooting to fail?”

“In other words, the opponent possesses a mobility far superior than our troops?”

In the past, in order to counter the superior individual skills displayed from mages of the Imperial army, the Republican military developed the technique of regulated shooting. By relying on teamwork and the advantage in numbers, it was capable of easily bringing down overconfident mages that carelessly approached the Republican forces.

Although this kind of military doctrine heavily relied on the condition of having a numerical advantage over their opponents, but for the Republican army, it was already a good enough solution. Hence began the belief that as long as the barrage of assault has been properly initiated, not a single magician is capable of surviving it.

“Spatial detonations were also avoided. Most likely, the enemy sensed the locations that were aimed at and avoided them in the last second.”

“Performing evasive maneuvering in matters of seconds? Wouldn’t that mean the opponent is capable of completely avoiding all mana-based attacks?”

The basic concept behind regulated shooting was to first make use of large amounts of magic-guided shells to heavily inhibit the enemy’s retreat routes while then proceeding to shoot directly at them. At the same time, the speed and orientation of the opponent was measured, followed by bombarding the predicted routes of the enemy using explosion-based magic, aiming to propel them into the blast radius of the explosions.

However, if it was impossible to aim and measure the movements of the opponent then the effectiveness of this combat method would be significantly reduced. It was a method that heavily relies on the teamwork and synergies of an entire group; a group-oriented combat style. In other words, if this method of combat becomes ineffective, then the merit of fighting together as a team would also be rendered as near useless.

The heartbeats of the attending military officers momentarily tightened as they held their breath in silence. The amount of mana projected from the enemy’s

operation orb not only had exceeded the limits of measurement, but the phenomenon of the physical materialization of mana had also begun to manifest, amplifying the magic intensity by several folds. An overbearing amount of light was further created from the mixture of multiple interference patterns that resonated due to the collision of mana elements.

A type of magic that would normally require the combined efforts of multiple mages in order to initiate was suddenly brought forth by the hands of a single magician from the Imperial military.

“The observation machine also showed that the amount of mana manifested at that time exceeded the limit of measurement.”

“No way!? If that’s the case...”

The words that were being uttered abruptly stopped as the recorded reactions of the stabilization of mana elements were displayed in front of their eyes. An entire category of mana that could not be measured or analyzed; it was a unique phenomenon that countless mages and nations had attempted to achieve in the past but had given up.

In theory, the manifestation of mana in the physical world was regarded as an impossible phenomenon to realize due to the spatial interference caused from the instability of individual mana elements. It has always been considered as pure madness to attempt experiments on the topic of the realization of mana in its physical form, as it was taken for granted to be not feasible.

“...Impossible, that’s just not possible!”

The technology officer who understood more on this topic than anyone else frankly began to deny the reality of the situation. This could no longer be considered as magic that could be explained through science and technology, but more like something at the realm of fairy tales and legends.

[If thou come bearing malevolence against the Empire, then to God we shall pray to.]

The appearance of the figure recorded with the maximum amount of zoom quickly shocked the entire audience to silence. Although what was displayed might still be blurry and was filled with noise, it was impossible to mistake it as anything else.

“... ... Isn't that just a child?”

The appearance of the enemy Magician could only be described as very young. Yet the words that were being spoken carried forth a weight of destruction and annihilation. Together with the absurd amount of mana detected within the atmosphere, the chilliness of her voice betrayed hints heralding the soon-incoming descent of onslaught.

If the God that you pray to truly existed, would that being happen to be the Devil or the God of Destruction? The words that were said on screen couldn't help but cause the listeners to quietly hold their heads in frustration as they sought for the salvation of the Lord.

[O Lord, may your benevolence protect us from the wickedness of man. O Lord, may your righteousness grant us strength to defeat those that intrude of our nation.]

However, her words were pure and sincere, containing an innocence that could be reflected from the gaze of her eyes. Can this girl really be considered as an enemy magician? The words that she had been uttering were nothing but prayers.

[Please save us from the invasion of the heretics. O God, grant me the powers to slay our enemies.]

Are we truly beings that should not be allowed to exist? One couldn't help but to retort such phrases after seeing the pitiful gaze that she bore, as if judging them for their sins.

[I hereby declare to those that are present, you are currently intruding upon the Empire's territory.]

It was as if she was a Miko come bearing in arms with the decrees of god, those words clearly contained the weight of faith behind them.

[We will spend every effort in order to defend our nation, because the lives of our people rests behind our backs.]

The words that were uttered were filled with a sense of duty. Just this alone was able to convey to the viewers that this was her duty, together with the emotions of wishing to protect her people.

It was for that reason alone that brought her to stand before them.

[Answer me. Just why do you desire to invade the Empire, to invade our homeland?]

Perhaps it was due to a sense of urgency that disaster would soon befall upon them, the 106th Squadron began to heavily concentrate their remaining firepower, giving their all to hinder the opponent's chanting, even if it was just to delay it for a little while longer.

[O Saints, let us believe in the grace of our Lord, for we who knew not of fear.]

However, reality was cruel. Fate was not on their side. Even if God was watching, he would only be smiling at her.

[Lament not of our fate, for the Lord hath not forsaken us!]

The condensed mana that had been gathered began to crackle, filling the observation device with noise. Suggesting that the concentration of mana elements present in the atmosphere at that moment was high enough to cause distortions to the spatial dimensions of reality.

[At the distant end of our journey, we shall reach the Promised Land.]

It was as if that entire sentence was the key which opened the secrets of Pandora's Box. The thoughts of the audience halted as the monitor in front of them began to glow at an intensity beyond imaginable. Until finally, the operation orb was damaged to the point that it lost all functionality, causing the recording to forcefully end at that moment.

“...Oh, God, please have mercy on our souls.”

God, is this...truly what you have been hoping for?

[chapter]

IV

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War College



CHAPTER 4

War College

Imperial War College Selection Review Conference

“It is time, we will now begin the third round of review of the Imperial War College Selection Conference.”

The session chair was a professor from the War College. The attending officials were all exceptional talents that could literally be considered as the pillars which supported the Imperial military. In regards to the selection of talents who will later be shouldering the weight and responsibilities for the previous generation, the Empire was never hesitant in committing as much manpower and time necessary.

The result was the birth of numerous excellent and capable commanders across all levels within the military command structure.

“The topic for today would be the review of the candidates that have been nominated by the selection committee.”

It was precisely because of this that the selection of War College candidates had often been regarded as one of the key topics for discussion along with that of national policy and defence strategies. Hence, they would take into consideration the all sorts of possible factors during the selection process, not sparing any effort to unearth the most suitable talent.

The military acknowledges the wide array of skills and attributes of their personnel, and as such, they were willing to hold a second or third round of review

with different panels of judges even for the candidates that had previously failed. They believe that eliminating an exceptionally talented officer during a single round of selection would be a huge loss to the Empire.

And the history of the Empire proved that this philosophy was correct.

It was thanks to this that many of the highly decorated officers within the Imperial army and navy were able to climb to their current position today. Even General Moltke, who was highly favored by one of the committee judges which had proclaimed that his greatest accomplishment in his military career was the ‘selection of the great Moltke’, had previously received harsh criticisms from other members of the panel stating that ‘this candidate is not fit to be a soldier’, and was unable to pass the selection process until the third round of reviews.

“As usual, I hope that everyone can provide inputs based on their respective backgrounds regardless of whether they are from the frontlines, the General Staff Office or the War College, and have a lively discussion.”

According to the tradition of the Imperial War College, it was not important which round the personnel was selected.

Recent examples would be the outstanding officers such as Zettois and Rudelsdorf, who were both selected in the second round. The former was deemed as ‘having a personality that was too academically inclined, thus not suitable to become a general’, while the latter was criticized to be ‘quick witted and full of drive, but has the tendency of being delusional’. They were only selected on the subsequent round of review.

However, the two of them were now widely regarded as pillars that will soon be shouldering the weight which will determine the future of the Empire. Thus, they were qualified to take part in the selection panel. It was because of cases like this,

there was a saying that those who were able to pass the selection process on the first round won't ever amount to anything.

Therefore, in order to keep dogmatism to a minimal, they were willing to even do the reverse and disqualify those who had actually qualified, and chose to confirm them in the second and third round of reviews instead. This made it clear just how thorough the Empire was in conducting the selection process.

“First of all, we will begin with the suggestion provided by Major Lehrgen from the Department of Personnel Affairs for the re-examination of a candidate on the first round of the selection process.”

Even for the Empire who took things this far, it was unusual for them to suddenly re-examine a candidate that had already passed, and to deliberate whether or not the outcome should have been different.

That was why—

All those in attendance showed an expression of surprise, and directed their baffled gaze towards the War College Professor who was chairing the conference.

Requesting for the re-examination of a candidate that had passed the first two rounds of selection without any problem, just what was the purpose behind this?

Even the War College professor who was the session chair probably didn't understand.

“The subject of this review received the highest of evaluation in the first selection round, which was done anonymously to ensure fairness.”

An anonymous evaluation was conducted for the first selection round where documents containing the personal information of the candidates were redacted, and the examination process was done by multiple judges. The judges were only able to see the actual accomplishments of each candidate, as well as the evaluations given by the Training and Intel Department. Through this process, favouritism and bias were eliminated, making the judgement fairer.

Only after the judging was completed, would the personal information be disclosed, and the candidate would then proceed along the path towards becoming an elite officer in the military. The entire scrutinization process was strictly performed and in fairness. And thus receiving the highest evaluation at this stage meant that the military did not discover any flaw in the candidate's career so far.

“Regardless, the Personnel Affairs Section Chief from the General Staff Office had expressed his objection, and had put forward a request for a re-examination. This review conference is held partly on his request.”

The professor was hinting that he couldn't fathom why Lehrgen had requested for a re-examination. In actual fact, if this wasn't proposed by the Section Chief from the Department of Personnel Affairs within the General Staff Office, who was able to scrutinize more of the information regarding the candidate in detail, the request for a re-examination most likely would not have been approved.

Even if there were any issues with the candidates that have made it through the selection process in the past, the problem normally lies with them being too mediocre. That was why even the professor who was chairing the conference was baffled. During the anonymous evaluation phase, very few officers receive great scores. Not to mention that the candidate in discussion this time had an overwhelming score, so essentially, Major Lehrgen was questioning the eligibility of the top candidate.

If the candidate was a child of an influential officer in the military or related to nobles, questioning the fairness of the selection would make more sense. This belonged to the minority, but there were definitely cases where favoritism played a part.

But for this case, the candidate was an orphan of a soldier, and of course, there weren't any influential relatives involved. The one who made the recommendation was unrelated to the candidate, and there were no ties to any noble factions either. Not just that, the recommendation was made by a veteran officer who was known for honesty. An officer with actual combat merits, and didn't have any disciplinary records.

Rejecting an officer with such outstanding records, who rose all the way by her own capability was unimaginable for the tradition of the military. Hence, everyone in attendance had casted a look of doubt towards the Personnel Affairs Section Chief Major Lehrgen.

"Section chief Lehrgen, I would like to know the basis behind your judgement. From the records, I think she is an excellent candidate."

Although his tone was a lighthearted, Brigadier General Rudelsdorf's had asked the question that was on everyone's mind. What was the reason?

"Judging from the recommendation provided by the local unit, the results from OCS (Officer Cadet School), background investigation done by the Intelligence Bureau, investigative report done by the Military Police, and along with her war merits, this officer had showed an outstanding performance. Just where does the problem lie?"

Meritorious recommendations are typically used as a means to select officers with exceptional abilities. Officers in their prime and those who were still young would

often be selected, sending the best possible talents to the best places, in hope of the benefit it would bring in the future.

The recommendation provided by the local unit was unreserved in giving the candidate their praises. Considering the results from OCS, although the candidate's combat technique was a little lacking, her combat experience was still top notch. Based solely on adaptability, she was a talent that fully deserved to be the top candidate during the selection. In fact, the assessment score was nearly perfect.

Aside from this, even the usually naggy Intelligence Bureau and the Military Police had nothing but praises for her, which couldn't help but make one wonder just how many similar cases had occurred in the past.

"Hmm, how should I put this... This is a highly anticipated candidate in recent years. I believe this is the common consensus of the majority of us present."

In other words, questioning the selection of such an impressive candidate was hard to fathom, even for Brigadier General Rudelsdorf, who had a difficult personality. If the re-examination proposal wasn't made by the elite of the elites from the Personnel Department within the General Staff Office, the Section Chief who was known to not tolerate any mistakes, everyone would think that this was a joke and curse him out.

"That is true, the subject's performance is among the best or as good as the best that I have seen, but despite that, I find it hard to accept."

However, Major Lehrgen expressed clearly that he was proposing this review even though he acknowledged the evaluations given by the panel. In other words, he didn't want to accept the selection of this candidate despite these evaluations.

“Ranked second during cadet school, have no run-ins with the Military Police, and the Intelligence Bureau had determined that she is a patriot, vouching for the candidate’s ability in keeping information confidential. An officer who even received a recommendation from a combat unit.”

It goes without saying that this excuse was nonsensical to the attendees. In order to keep the candidate anonymous, medals awarded to the candidate and all OCS experience were withheld. But it wouldn’t be surprising if this outstanding candidate had been awarded a Field Aerial Combat medal or above.

After all, the candidate had received a recommendation from the local unit, which required both an excellent character and exemplary performance.

“If we were to disqualify this candidate, then by standards this year’s selection result would become zero.”

These words appeared to reflect the thoughts of the majority present. For aside from the general consensus that the candidate possessed excellent capability, accomplishments and school grades, there weren’t any other comments. If they were to disqualify such an outstanding candidate, then they would need to disqualify the rest of the candidates as well.

“As an exception this time around, the anonymity of the candidate will be revoked. Please take a look at this document.”

The Personnel Department General Affairs Section Chief who couldn’t stand it anymore started passing around the relevant documents. Due to the personal information of the candidates being anonymized during selection, it should normally remain the same during the review. However, depending on the circumstances, he had the authority to withdraw the anonymity.

As an acquaintance of Major Lehrgen, he wanted to provide as much assistance as possible. Frankly speaking, this was an act of kindness done to safeguard Lehrgen's career.

For someone who already possessed the Silver Wings Assault Medal which was rare as it was given, not to mention that she had further received a recommendation for the Field Aerial Combat Medal for her achievements on the frontlines. Such officers would normally be regarded as a potential core member of the military in the future, and would be warmly welcomed during the selection process.

However, the problem they had encountered was the fact that the one who had achieved these merits was a child of only eleven years of age. Any officer with a sound mind would normally hesitate in sending such a child onto the battlefield. Major Lehrgen had probably objected to her enrolment due to her age. Although that was the assumption made by the Personnel Department General Affairs Section Chief, in the end he still agreed to declassify the information.

“... Which means, those bountiful war merits were accomplished by this child?”

Even Brigadier General Rudelsdorf who was known for his difficult personality was stunned by the details of her age. They finally realized how abnormal the situation was and the room instantly became silent, with confusion lingering in the air.

Rising to the rank of First Lieutenant Mage at the age of eleven. Graduated second place in OCS, awarded the Silver Wings Assault medal and was recommended for the Field Aerial Combat medal. An Ace of Aces who had downed 62 mages (32 kill assists) and was bestowed with the nickname 'Mithril'. On top of that, her resume included an assignment with the Training Department.

It made them hesitate, wondering if they should laugh or not. A resume that could only be described as exemplary.

“Although it is an urgent matter for us to nurture as many Mage officers as possible, we should still have an age restriction.”

Many of the attendees felt she was simply too young, and they were doubtful about giving her command of a unit— one on the scale of a wing. Plainly speaking, even though the need of nurturing mage officers has always been treated as a priority, there were still plenty of criticisms regarding the current schemes of operation being simply too focused on the short term gains.

“That’s right, no matter how capable she might be as a mage officer, but it is still questionable regarding her ability to take on the role of a senior commanding officer.”

After all, it takes a lot of effort to achieve excellence in a single professional field. There were plenty of Aerial Mages they were confident of in terms of their exceptional combat abilities, but unexpectedly very few of them possessed the qualities necessary to be considered as a capable commander.

That’s why, no matter how outstanding the skills of a Mage officer might be, it doesn’t necessarily mean they would be suited to become a commander or senior officer. A successful athlete might not necessarily make a great coach. Even if someone was capable in combat, it does not translate to the additional criterias needed of a commander.

Hence, some of the officers had thought that Lehrgen was in doubt because of her age and abilities. Judging from this, there was definitely room for further debate.

“There are no problems with her potential. More importantly, her war merits, local recommendations and all other details satisfies the criteria completely. There isn’t any reason to doubt her abilities.”

Nevertheless, the committee members who had evaluated her refuted these worries. Her records indicated her experience in leading a flight, and there weren’t any mistakes in her command. If she couldn’t even command a flight, then there wouldn’t be any point in training her to be an officer, and on a side note, there was a surprising number of people who failed at this stage.

However, considering her local unit recommendation, it wasn’t appropriate to suspect her command ability, at least for now.

“She is an officer who had gone through an accelerated training program. Her knowledge regarding military tactics and operations are most likely very lopsided. It might be more suitable for her to complete Staff Officer education first.”

Some of the officers still raised their doubts. After all, she had never received proper staff officer education. Even if she performed well in live combat, there was a chance she might be lacking in certain areas. Putting aside military tactics and strategy, will she be able to properly analyze the various complicated conditions encountered on the battlefield and take command above that of a typical unit leader? They questioned the sense in selecting her.

“Her graduation thesis was titled ‘The logistics behind a highly mobile war theatre’. The Rail Department regarded this dissertation very highly.”

However, the members of panel that had given her outstanding grades during the anonymous judging refused to back down. After all, she had already proven herself to be capable of providing in-depth discussions of topics on the strategic level prior to graduation.

Furthermore, the thesis was on a low profile topic which was uncommon among the ambitious cadets in OCS. Yet considering her war merits, this unexpectedly made sense. *For one to actively explore the logistics behind a war theatre, could the author have had prior experiences on the battlefield?*— That was the kind of thoughts the reviewers had made during the anonymous assessment. Anyone who read this thesis would think this was a work of an expert, and would not delve any further.

And to those who are experts in this field, no matter how much they dislike it, they couldn't help but admire the concise yet well-expressed focal point of the thesis content. The outline was simple. It speaks of the importance of resource reserves, and outlines methods on improving the flow of materials through the standardization and regulation of warehouse operations in order to secure proper supply lines. It concentrates heavily on efficiency, with the goal of storing only emergency supplies, and eliminating all unnecessary resources.

It criticizes the storage of unnecessary materials, and proposed the management of necessary resources, which would allow units to operate normally on the front lines. The Army Rail Department Chief had sang words of praise in regards to content of the paper, and specifically requested for the author to be assigned to the Rail Department, a story rather famous between logistics personnel.

In fact, several seasoned senior officers had given rave reviews when they assessed the thesis. They commented that anyone who experienced launching an attack while short on resources will definitely understand the value of this paper.

Brigadier General Rudelsdorf who was troubled by the logistic operations during battles was no exception. That was why no one had possibly imagined the author was only eleven years of age when they were conducting the anonymous assessment.

“Please excuse my interruption, I had not taken into account the identity of the author because it was classified... But this isn’t a research report from the War College?”

“No, this was a thesis she wrote during her time in OCS.”

“My apologies, but is there still a need to continue with the review? I believe it is no longer necessary.”

As soon as the discussion had progressed towards logistics, it became hard to argue that the candidate was short sighted in regards to military tactics and operations. Brigadier General Rudelsdorf tilted his head in confusion. The more they debated, the more certain they were that the candidate should be selected. Reasons of doubt became fewer over time.

And as expected, even he probably couldn’t stand it any longer. Brigadier General Zettois who had kept his silence all this while said with an impatient expression. He wasn’t particularly loud, and his tone was filled with doubt.

“I have a question. It was stated that the candidate had previously received during her time as a cadet in OCS the recommendation to attend War College from Brigadier General Walkopf, however it was rejected by the Personnel Department. I would like to seek a clarification about this.”

From Brigadier General Zettois’ perspective, aside from her age, First Lieutenant Degurechaff was undoubtedly an excellent candidate. She had already received high evaluations from a portion of the commissioned officers during her time in OCS.

Her performance in the conflict zone had caught the eye of Brigadier General Walkopf, who then recommended for her enrolment into the War College back then. Even though they few chances to meet directly, from the impression that Zettois had gained after the several times that they had spoken, he found it hard to believe that Walkopf would make such a blunderous recommendation.

For Zettois, First Lieutenant Degurechaff was highly evaluated for her capabilities, which had never been questioned before.

“Why wasn’t she assessed for selection? Who rejected her candidacy?”

“... It was me. The reason was her age and lack of war merit.”

In response to Major Lehrgen’s answer, Zettois nodded as if he expected that answer, and looked at him sternly.

“Major Lehrgen.”

“Yes, how may I assist, General Sir?”

“I don’t want to question your impartiality, so I will overlook the first rejection, but why did you request for this re-examination?”

What Lehrgen had said was enough for others to begin to question the integrity of his conduct. Although Brigadier General Zettois didn’t say it out loud, but everyone shared the same doubt. A candidate that possessed this much talent and bountiful war merits, she was definitely an excellent officer. Why was there a need to question her eligibility?

“... Because I have serious doubts about First Lieutenant Degurechaff’s character.”

For Major Lehrgen, the source of his concern was his distrust of First Lieutenant Degurechaff’s personality; his experience in appraising countless officers told him that there was something wrong with this person.

The feeling which had began as a concern had now turned deep into distrust, slowly setting roots into his heart. He had made up his mind to prevent this person with an abnormal character from infiltrating deep into the core of the imperial army.

“Are you saying this while fully aware of the high scores she had achieved in both the psychometrics examination and the confidentiality assessment conducted by the Intelligence Bureau?”

“Yes.”

As expected, she passed both the psychometrics assessment and the scrutiny by the Intelligence Bureau. Not only that, depending on the time and place, she might have also been praised by religious leaders for being a devout believer. After all, most soldiers don't have the mindset to ask god for forgiveness during a battle. However, this was only able to show that the inspections were unable to detect any abnormality in the candidate.

“Are you questioning the results of these investigations?”

“Yes, it’s like what you said. However, I am not doubting the truthfulness of these reports, I think the investigations all yield conclusive results.”

The figures from the investigation were accurately derived. After all, that's not where her abnormality lies. *Sigh, this can't be helped.* The psychometrics examination was drafted towards the mindset of an adult professional soldier, not towards abnormal beings like her. Hence, it could be considered that the results were genuine.

But that was where the abnormality lies..

“Major Lehrgen, I want to confirm something. At the same time, I want to remind you that everything you say would be recorded in the minutes.”

“Yes Sir.”

For Major Lehrgen, both the records and the potential damage towards his career were something which worries him to no end. After all, he was just one of the thousands talents set on the path of the elites. Considering his position, he should avoid such debates as much as possible.

Yet nevertheless, he still felt an urge to say his piece. His entire body and mind was warning him of a nemesis-like existence to him as a human. That was an alien-like existence, an abnormality he couldn't tolerate.

“Why do you have reservations about the character of First Lieutenant Degurechaff?”

“I've met her three times before.”

The first time he met her, he felt she was an outstanding officer cadet; The second time, he felt she was a terrifying officer cadet; The third time, he was sure she was an insane megalomania officer cadet.

“For official business or in private?”

“All three times were for official businesses. I met her three times during my inspection tour of OCS.”

There were probably no other cadets that left a deeper impression than her, and there probably won't be any in the future. At least he could confirm that she was abnormal. Calm and rational; patriotic with an Egalitarian mindset; deeply religious and Liberalist. Despite having praiseworthy qualities, she still appeared distorted. Both a sense of wrongness and distortion that was difficult to describe engulfed her at the same time.

“Are you perhaps suggesting that she did something wrong in the past? Or was it to do with her past conducts?”

“Please take a look at the comments left by the instructors. A scratchy ‘abnormal’ is written on top.”

An interesting record was left by the instructor who had interacted with her the most. Even though she was given outstanding grades for everything, the word ‘abnormal’ was also added in private. Was the sense of wrongness the instructor felt simply just her character? Normally, even if instructors pointed out the shortcomings of the cadets, they would never write down the comment ‘abnormal’.

“... Hmm, so there is a reason for this. Please explain.”

When he heard that, Brigadier General Zettois relented his accusatory posture and adopted a listening attitude; He felt that he had to confirm the facts from an absolutely impartial viewpoint.

“This could be considered as an abnormal situation. It was my first time seeing a cadet officer with fully formed personality and beliefs that regards humans as objects.”

Just like a perfectly built robot that obeys and executes orders faithfully. This was an ideal officer. Despite that, she understood reality and had never said any empty remarks. No matter what, she wasn't normal.

That was why that incident happened when he met her the third time.

“Don't you think it's something only found in geniuses?”

“These characteristics of hers were definitely useful on the battlefield. In fact, Brigadier General Walkopf and the Intelligence Bureau once recommended her for the 2nd Class Iron Cross award.”

Most importantly, it felt wrong to think of that person as a newly commissioned officer. After pushing his authority to the limit, Lehrgen realized that there were signs of her participating in live combat even before her commission as a Second Lieutenant.

There were limited clues, but after consolidating them, the suspicion of her taking part in an operation of the Intelligence Bureau in the past was rather high. Even though the award was withdrawn at the application stage, something definitely happened the moment they submitted the application for the Second Class Iron Cross award.

“... You mean during her on-site apprenticeship?”

The surprise was spread to everyone, and the room began to turn rowdy. Although it might be difficult to swallow at first, but based on the short amount of time in which she had accumulated her already impressive war merits, it made this event seem much more believable.

If this happened during her on-site apprenticeship, that meant a child around nine years old not only took part in a live operation, but also qualified for a medal in the end? If words of this spreads out, it would just be laughed off as a bad joke. Hearing such a bad joke in a selection panel to decide candidates who will shoulder the future of the military was ridiculous.

“After pressing the Intelligence Bureau, I discovered that there is a high possibility that she took part in some highly classified operation.”

Territorial dispute zones. For an officer cadet, it was a dangerous place for on-site apprenticeship, but still within reasons. However, to participate in a long distance infiltration exercise into enemy territory? Normally, the thoughts of having to do that was something which would cause even grown men to shiver in fear.

Crossing land infested with ruffians while fully armed in the middle of the night. The destination being an isolated allied base. No matter what, this wasn't an operation that any officer cadet would be capable of commanding. A friend from in the Intelligence Bureau who had shared this information had even assumed that the operation was conducted by a seasoned Warrant Officer.

That was only natural. If such a capable officer were to appear, even the Intelligence Bureau would wish to seek their assistance. But they probably never would have expected her to be an Officer Cadet going through her apprenticeship. Lehrgen suspected that the medal application was withdrawn after they realized that Tanya was an Officer Cadet.

“... You are telling me that a cadet took part in an operation in a war zone, and her performance prompted the Intelligence Bureau to apply for a commendation for her?”

At this point of the discussion, it was impossible to ignore her abnormality. The Intelligence Officers who were showered with gazes from the other participants promptly shook their heads in denial, gesturing that they didn't know. Everyone was aware that their department policy was that the right hand won't know what the left hand was doing. But if they investigated, they will definitely uncover something. After all, their faces appeared grim since moments ago.

“If possible, I wish to declassify this information.”

“I will look into it. And so? If that is all, then she is just an outstanding officer.”

The investigation is under my purview. Even though that was the subtle meaning behind these words, the session chair had already taken this to be the truth. But that was why he felt confused.

Aside from her age, this officer had no problems with merits and grades, so why did he pursue the matter this far.

“When she was in OCS, she intimidated a junior cadet who disobeyed orders with a magic blade.”

“... Keeping the detractors in line is part of the responsibility of senior cadets, right?”

Taking things to the extremes, military law prohibits handing out punishment in private, but there were unspoken rules within the organization hidden under the

table. For example, it was commonplace for injuries to occur during combat training brought on by the senior cadets.

Putting it bluntly, if Tanya was to be penalized for such a minor incident, then almost all of the soldiers in the military would also need to be penalized.

“She was serious about splitting the other guy’s head. If the instructor didn’t step in, someone probably would’ve been permanently disabled.”

No, that’s not it! Lehrgen explained as he suppressed the urge to scream. He understood very clearly, it was something you have to be there to understand.

“... Major, if you take the words of the instructors too seriously, there would be corpses everywhere in the army.”

Military instructors using overly intense words on new recruits was a norm for soldiers. Considering the language used by trainers in the naval, army or aerial mage officer training, phrases such as ‘I will slaughter you’ would be considered as the cute end of the scale. The education method of absolutely demeaning the value of a human lives were a common sight in the military.

Curses like ‘I will cleave open your damned head’ or ‘I will blast your hollow brains out’ could be heard echoing on the training field frequently. It’s not like physical punishment was off limits, it just wasn’t recommended.

“Even though she might be too extreme, this evaluation is a bit too much.”

“Considering her age, we can even compliment her self restraint.”

If it was just on the level of verbal abuse and intimidation, this was rather cute—Most of the soldiers probably make this judgement based on their personal experience. That was because they didn't witness the scene with their own eyes.

They even think that she was showing kindness by not court martialing the subject for repeated insubordination. After all, the worst case for defying the orders of a superior would be execution. In other words, instead of executing recruits who lacked the ability to make judgement, beating them up would be a much kinder way.

“Hmm, it seemed that the Personnel Affairs Section Chief is worried about her age and self restraint, and I can understand his concern.”

At this stage of the discussion, their conclusion was rock steady. That's right, she didn't act her age in some areas. The Personnel Affairs Section Chief's criticism about her abuse of recruits might be too extreme, but it was still within tolerable range; It was understandable for Section Chief Lehrgen to be worried about her exceptional talent.

But enrolling her into the war college would provide her with the education that she lacked previously, allowing her to experience realms she had never tried before. This will definitely nurture her towards becoming a great and exceptional officer.

“But Major Lehrgen, your opinion is too objective. You have to be more subjective.”

There were some disputes along the way, but they decided to acknowledged her selection.

“Of course, we also recognize that you are asking for integrity. However, considering your status and position, you are too engrossed over first impressions.”

“On the other hand, you performed your investigation well. Reining the Intelligence Bureau in would be a problem.”

Or rather, no one had thought that the Personnel Affairs Section Chief’s intention was to discuss about Tanya. Because of the dynamics of military politics, the Section Chief who had to maintain exceptional interpersonal relationships probably couldn’t critique the Intelligence Bureau directly. That’s why he made his criticism in the guise of another topic— That’s how most of the people saw this incident.

It wasn’t stated clearly, but they assumed that the Section Chief discovered the ‘non transparent behaviour’ of the Intelligence Bureau while scrutinizing the personnel reports, and was using this request for a review to critique the Intelligence Bureau. He pointed out the evaluation given by the Intelligence Bureau this way, which hinted at the secret operation conducted by them and their ‘non transparent behaviour’. If that was true, his action wasn’t a mistake, and could even be commended. As for the Intelligence Bureau, they couldn’t find fault with Major Lehrgen, and would even need to apologize in return.

Which was to say, the general consensus of everyone present was that the Personnel Affairs Section Chief investigated this well. In conclusion, they thought of this as questioning the secrecy policies of the Intelligence Bureau in his pursuit of integrity and justice.

“Thank you for your hard work, Major Lehrgen. Even though we didn’t revoke her selection, we will accept the request to audit the Intelligence Bureau.”

“... My thanks.”

Contrary to Major Lehrgen's intention, no one stood up to blockade the selection.

At the furthest border of the west within the Rhine frontlines. At a place where she might be woken at any hour of the day to execute engagement missions. During this period when her body was soaked in mud and the blood of her enemies, Tanya received a notice that she was promoted to First Lieutenant. Although it wasn't by much, it was still a good thing that her basic salary had increased.

Furthermore, another news which had made Tanya even happier was her enrolment notice from the War College, which had arrived together with her promotion papers. This was fortunate indeed. First Lieutenant Schwarzkopf had also mentioned that the capabilities of Corporal Serbiakof had been affirmed in live combat, as such he would also be recommending her enrolment into Officer Cadet School, and thus told Tanya to leave behind her worries when attending war college. Hence there was no need for Tanya to hold back.

Not needing to pretend to worry about her subordinates was a lucky break for Tanya.

And the all important notification of enrolment came just as she had wished, done through the recommendation of others, which was an honourable manner. Application could only be done by the ranks of First Lieutenants and above, so she wasn't able to do so herself. After asking around, it seemed that a highly regarded person had also recommended her enrolment through her war merits. It goes without saying that Tanya was really happy with her social network that she had built quietly, and readily accepted the invitation to attend war college, which meant reassignment to the safe zones in the rear.

And so—

First Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff who was eleven years old on paper begun enjoying her second college life. In the eyes of others, she was skipping grades, but in actual fact, this was her second time studying in college. From her perspective, it wouldn't take much effort for her to adjust to this lifestyle.

And of course, the education policy and method of teaching in war college was very different from typical colleges. Yet for Tanya, what it meant was living comfortably in the rear with three hot meals a day. Compared to the frontlines, life in the rear was much more enjoyable.

From Tanya's perspective, the main essence of college life was practically the same. Based on signaling theory, as long as one can demonstrate their worth in human capital, then war college was fundamentally just a college after all. Not only that, Tanya's sense of values had even judged that it was better than normal colleges in some areas.

From her experience, not needing to pay school fees and even receiving an allowance meant that her future was bright.

It was a college with many benefits. That was why First Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff was studying passionately in War College as a freshman. Despite having a height more suited to carrying that of a primary schooler's backpack, the uniform she wore fitted unnaturally well, along with a disproportionately large officer's bag hanging by her side.

At the same time, Tanya carried her standard equipment of rifle and Operation Orb which she couldn't let go of since her times in the battlefield, and headed to college after finishing her homework. And of course, she knew very well that she should be bringing stationery instead of a rifle to school.

That might be so, but having a weapon near her had become a habit, and she would feel uneasy without it. After all, she might run into crazy shooters, religious fanatics or be lucky enough to run into existence X. That was why she had to be prepared mentally for battle and patiently wait for the opportune moment. This was something she couldn't and wasn't able to rest easy about.

That's right, the mentality of being prepared for war. That was why a child like First Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff who skipped grades was able to blend easily into the environment so naturally. Even though she didn't intend for this, but for an officer decorated with the Silver Wing Assault medal who had just returned from the frontlines, it was unlikely to be looked down upon for carrying the intense aura of the battlefield with her.

In addition, she would unconsciously imagine the moment she shoots existence X while grinding her teeth as she disassembles and clean her rifle during break time. When an instructor asked her why she carried her rifle with her, the answer left a deep impression.

The subject would be stunned for a moment, show a confused expression that fit her age, then reply calmly:

“Since I might need to bet my meaning of existence on this equipment at any moment, I will feel uneasy if I didn't have it on me. I am very timid after all.”

“... Which means to say that you won't feel at ease if you don't have this with you?”

“Yes, that is correct. Please think of this as the childish behaviour of a toddler refusing to let go of her favourite blanket, and laugh it off.”

Such an action would give a decisive impression. And so, even though she was a child, but the impression she imprints on others was too intense. This allowed everyone to know what kind of person First Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff was without needing to spend too much time with her. She would discuss with her classmates in her neighbouring desk how to crush the enemy with a smile and explain her concept of national defence, a soldier that was scary and reliable at the same time.

“Good morning, guard commander Laagan.”

He only realized she was here after hearing the greeting. He couldn't detect her presence at all. He was a war veteran, but probably looked rusty to the group who had returned fresh from the battlefield. Or was it because she was an exceptional soldier?

“Good morning, First Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff. Excuse me, do you have a rifle with you today?”

As a non-commissioned officer (NCO), I have seen countless famous soldiers, but an officer with such a bright future was a rare sight. After researching a little, there had been no cases of anyone studying in the war college during their early teens. But before that, being commissioned a First Lieutenant a little after the age of ten was even more amazing.

Seems that this was a big world after all.

I have never been caught off guard on the battlefield, but an officer actually sneaked to my back so easily. It was easy to tell that you can't judge First Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff by her appearance. I heard that she will bring her

rifle and operation orb every day and leave it to the guard commander on duty for safekeeping.

Her refusal to let go of her weapon was probably because of her experience on the battlefield. Occasionally, there would be people who couldn't let go of their weapons after returning from a warzone, but she seemed different from them. She didn't seem too uneasy when she deposited her weapon.

In a word, she was forcing herself to make her weapon into a habit. I just said so, but following her doctrine of being ready for battle at any moment to such an extent, as expected of someone who earned a Field Aerial Combat medal at such a tender age. The lessons of war were engraved deeply in her, and she had good attitude towards NCOs.

The next time I take to the field, I have better not differentiate the enemy by their age. I might die if I hesitate to fire. I will treat this as a lesson.

“That's right. It is shameful, but I still can't break this habit.”

I can empathize with her. I will search for cover unconsciously long before I can fall asleep easily in a bed with moonlight. Even though I knew the place was safe, the habits I learned seriously on the battlefield wasn't something that could be changed easily.

“Not at all, this is a good thing.”

Or rather, this proved that she understood the important points on the battlefield. Maintaining a normal psyche and learning the important things in the warzone was a trial for fresh Second Lieutenants. The battlefield was a place that would ravage their deep rooted beliefs.

In the clashes where courage, honor and glory were covered in mud, only a select few officers could gain fame. The secret only these few officers knew wasn't anything difficult. That was to listen to the NCOs, and state opinions they would be agreeable with. But the number of officers who could achieve this were really low.

“Thank you. The affirmation of a veteran NCO pleases me more than anything else.”

That's why I respect the girl before me for the content of her character, and not just her appearance, and converse with her sincerely.

A veteran NCO who knew how to appreciate good officers will grow. With such a thought in mind, the guard commander decided to show her respect to this petite First Lieutenant by performing his duty faithfully.

“Pardon me, may I ask for your reason of visit, Lieutenant? As you know, today is a holiday and there are no classes today.”

This was a common day of rest for society. Which was Sunday. For devout believers, most of them will head to church for mass today. Some will confess their sins; it was said that this First Lieutenant will head to church and pray really hard in the morning too. Most importantly I caught her staring at the statue of god more than once.

“Yes, the reason is simple. I wish to use the library facilities. The books in the archives room of the dormitory isn't too well stocked.”

And the reason was plain, First Lieutenant Degurechaff was really hard working, even the eccentric Head Librarian also praised her knowledge, curiosity and thirst

for knowledge, saying that she was a model soldier. I even heard the older officers mentioned that her re-analysis of old battles and concepts even made the Operation Department of Staff Headquarters sigh in admiration.

Just what is inside that tiny brain of hers—— I wondered sincerely.

“Pardon me. If possible, please allow me to safekeep your weapons as usual.”

Normally, safekeeping the personal belongings of an officer required unnecessary procedures, which felt like a hassle. But it’s different for this First Lieutenant. On the battlefield, there is no companion who is more reliable than your rifle. And for Mages, Operational Orbs were as indispensable as a rifle. It was an honour to safekeep these two items, so it wasn’t a hassle at all.

“Let’s do so. I will take my leave then.”

After swiftly finishing the paperwork at the designated place, she kept the safekeeping document with practiced movements and headed into the college. It was just a glimpse, but I could see no hesitation in her steps, even though her strides were tiny. This made her petite back seemed unexpectedly huge. To receive the trust of such an officer, for her to entrust her companion to me unhesitantly—— When I thought this far, I couldn’t help feeling happy.

“... That Warrant Officer is still a haughty brat.”

But an idiot who didn’t understand the utmost joy of being a NCO poured cold water over me. Compared to her who became an officer at such a young age, this fool’s only good point is his age.

“Are you dumb? That isn’t some useless brat, but a brat who is giving off the stench of gunpowder and the blood of her enemies.”

As expected of a sergeant who was a veteran of war. But his knowledge was still too shallow. Even a veteran of many battles needed talent and the passion for war to become a complete soldier. In other words, if one doesn’t detest war from the perspective of a human, and doesn’t long for war even when one was away from the battlefield, they wouldn’t be able to understand her.

“Sergeant, is that all that you understand?”

“Hmm? No, I feel that she will be a good officer in the future, of course.”

Of course she will become a good officer. If she could command her own battalion, I would be happy to serve under her. I will be fine with breaching attack, last line of defense or even stalling defense. No, I will even be fine with covering the unit’s retreat. That’s how she was, a person loved by war.

It would surely be a glorious military unit that will make it into the history books. I am certain that I will achieve glory. I understand this well because I have seen countless officers. She is a hero.

“Pay attention, dumbass. The First Lieutenant has two Operation Orbs, and she only deposited one for safekeeping.”

But it’s useless to tell all that to an imbecile who couldn’t understand this. The First Lieutenant made a compromise for the sake of us performing our duty, that’s why she deposited her rifle and back up Operational Orb here. Keeping the other Orb— Which was the one she uses primarily, was analogous to her employing her authority.

However, I didn't feel like explaining to fools who didn't allow her to bring it in because they understood this point, and simply didn't realized she had another Orb.

“She must have forgotten, I can't let my guard down around her.”

“... It would be terrible if the duty officer caught her.”

... Eh, so that really is the extent of your understanding.

As she walked in the war college she was gradually getting used to, Tanya's state of mind was complicated as usual. If humans lost their sense of shame, what awaited them would be shamelessness, a dishonorable accusation for social living beings. This meant that knowing shame was a sign of a social animal.

Hence... *Ahhh, how shameful*—— That's why she thought this way. *Even though I am driven by my heart of vengeance, running around with a rifle on my back wasn't a praiseworthy act.* Tanya knew this very well.

And so, ever since the instructor warned her nonchalantly once, Tanya would deposit her rifle in the guard room whenever she was on campus. As a compromise, she equipped an army knife without any magical properties, so she wouldn't be completely unarmed.

But she would be lying if she said that she didn't mind the gazes of the guards whenever she deposited her weapons in the guard room. She didn't like basking in the eyes of people watching a weirdo. And she understood that there was a good reason behind these gazes, which made her even more hapless.

It might just be her mind playing tricks on her, but she had a feeling that the guards were mocking her; Look, that moron brought her rifle with her again. Even Tanya understood the psychology of a fully armed mage wandering around in the back lines being the center of attention. When she thought that she would do the same thing, she couldn't blame them for acting this way too.

Despite that, because of a reason she couldn't explain to others, Tanya had no choice but to keep a weapon in hand at all times.

It was a simple matter of pride. If she doesn't clearly maintain her raison d'être¹, and avoid religious beliefs from encroaching her rationality, her sense of self will gradually grow weaker. She could imagine a future of her being toyed with like a puppet. The super existence proclaiming to be god might be playing with puppets because of their boredom, but the one being toyed around wouldn't be able to take it.

Hence, in order to clearly reestablish the existence of the enemy in her mind, Tanya headed to the nearest church during off days recently, nurturing her hatred for existence X before the statues. Her heart was filled with endless hate for her archenemy, a healthy mind filled with curses for her foe. This was the abstract answer given by the individual known as Tanya Degurechaff to existence X that toys with humans. Even though she brought the rifle with the idea that she will shoot to kill existence X if she came across him, it was regrettable that she never ran into him.

¹ **Raison d'être:** Reason of being. A line that defines a person to be himself.

And of course, she knew that this was an unproductive action. It might be unproductive, but if she let her guard down, the curse of the Elisom type 95 will turn her into a devout 'believer of god' for real. Taking into consideration the need to protect her mental health, maintaining the mindset that the sight of existence X disgusts her was an unavoidable course of action.

Taking this lightly would be as good as taking breathing lightly or giving up on thinking.

"... Hmmp, which means that you don't want to be toyed around like a doll?"

The dignity of humans lies in their ability to think, Tanya believed this firmly. For humans that evolved from apes, it was the concept of thinking that set them apart from other organisms.

That was why she couldn't comprehend the idea 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed', which was an act of giving up on thinking.

For Tanya, when someone loses the ability to think, to question and to probe further, their existence wouldn't even be equivalent to a human, but just a robot that has the shape of a human. That was why Tanya Degurechaff respects thinking, loves debating and mocks dogmatists from the bottom of her heart.

That's why she laughs at fanatics and those who believe blindly. She finds it hard to accept that she was the same as those who blindly believe in the teachings of communism as if it was some kind of religion, morons who created mountains of dead bodies during their social experiments. All her hatred stem from her view of humans. Humans were great because they performed trial and error. Giving up on thinking, and forcing others to follow their dogmatic principles were absolutely stupid.

Existence X who was attempting to turn her into such a soldier was definitely her sworn enemy.

That might be so, but the remnants of her rational mind also made her think that letting her rage build up was unproductive. That was the reason why she set this matter aside for now and focused on her studies.

As she looked at her future, Tanya was very greedy on doing everything she can on improving her prospect. That was why she was heading to the library. Walking on the path she had gotten used to, she greeted the familiar staff and headed with certainty towards the library

“Reporting, First Lieutenant Degurechaff entering.”

After reaching the entrance of the library, she made a brief report before pushing the door open. The reason she did so was simple; the minimum rank to enroll in War College was First Lieutenant, so Tanya who was a First Lieutenant had the lowest rank.

Although it was Sunday, it wouldn't be surprising to find several people who arrived before her. And so, she had to be alert at all times, and assume a senior officer was inside at all times.

“Hmm?”

Her effort pays off, proving her concern to be well founded. Tanya who entered the library immediately saw a scholar-like soldier over half a century old inside, looking her way over piles of documents.

From the insignia on his shoulders, he was a Brigadier General. Judging from his dressing, he was probably a big shot. For this guest who arrived before her to be leaving through huge amount of maps and records, it was only natural for him to do so here if one considered the quality and quantity of the War college's archives. This was a big reason why military strategy research had to be dependent on the documents in the War College.

And of course, it wasn't a rare sight to see a big shot searching for information in the War College. After all, a lot of the records and thesis' were prohibited from being taken off site, and 'the only way to read it would be to come here yourself', so it was only natural for them to stay here.

“Eh, pardon my intrusion, Brigadier Sir.”

This was a golden opportunity as Tanya rejoiced in her heart for this wonderful coincidental meeting. No matter the era, having a friend in high places would only be a good thing. If you were seeking the chance to meet them, you would have to visit the places they might frequent personally, and increase the chance of a coincidental meeting.

That might be so, but the appearance of her body looked too young, and she would regrettably be rejected from entering places that serve alcohol. But of course, sitting with the big wigs in such places would only bring them displeasure.

On the other hand, it was possible to use her image as being dependable despite her young age to leave a good impression. Although it would be hard to pull that off if she doesn't deliberately act like a young child.

Asking her to act like a child was already beyond her realm of understanding, even more so for her to behave like a little girl, which was akin to comprehending the

behaviours of aliens. If there was an urgent need, she could fake a smile, but that's the limit of what she could do.

That was why she won't hesitate to make the most of her chances when they come.

“Ah, be at ease. It's fine to simply treat me as an alumnus at this moment.”

In response to her salute, his reaction felt more like a researcher or philosopher instead of a soldier. His character was dull in a way, but from what she could tell, his personality wasn't eccentric, and was forthcoming instead. That's the kind of impression the general gives.

“Yes, thank you for your kindness. I am cadet Tanya Degurechaff, commissioned by the Empire as a First Lieutenant.”

“I am Brigadier General Zettois. Serving as the Deputy Chief of Logistics in the General Staff Office.”

The Chief of Logistics in the General Staff Office! Isn't that the top gun of the group in the rear? How lucky.

“It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, General Sir.”

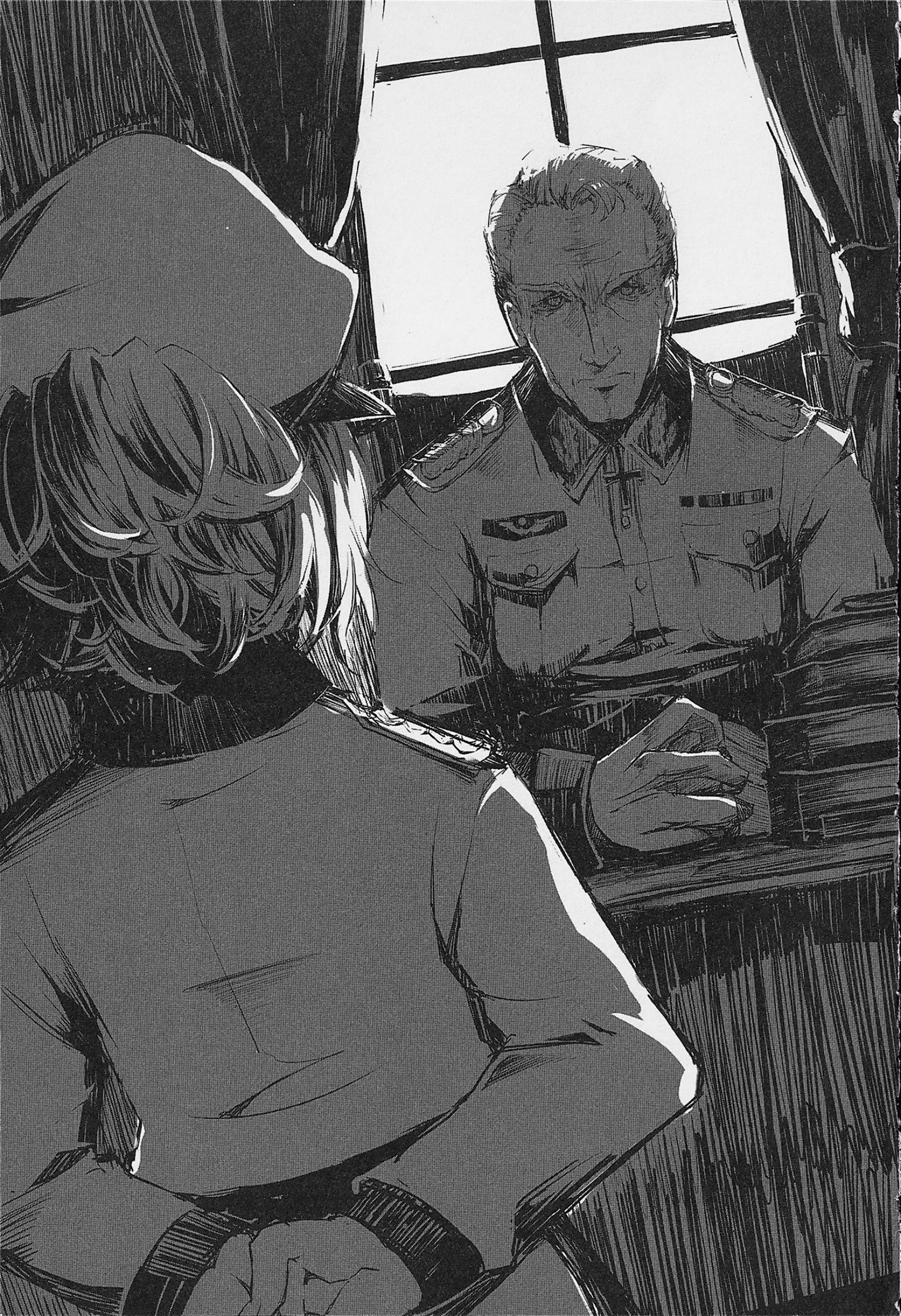
She said with sincerity. After all, his group had the same authority as the ones in charge of Personnel Affairs in the General Staff Office. In terms of a corporation, that would be the core team that determines the operation strategy.

It would be really fortunate to get to know someone from a place like that outside of office work.

“Hmm, do you have any pressing matters to attend to, Lieutenant?”

“Reporting, I don’t have anything urgent, General Sir. I came here today in order to study.”

Restraining her excitable urge to jump up, Tanya stated her objective honestly. Fortunately, she had been frequenting the library in order to satisfy her thirst for knowledge and research of law studies, so it shouldn’t feel unnatural to others.



“This is a good opportunity. If time permits, could you share with me the opinions of a young person?”

“Yes, I will be happy to oblige if I am not bothering you.”

“It’s fine, please relax.”

“Yes, pardon me.”

Thankfully, the other party bore some interest towards her too. This was much easier than briefing someone who was indifferent towards her. He was much easier to deal with than a director who couldn’t understand the necessity of a retrenchment exercise during a board briefing session.

“I have heard about you. You seem to be making a name for yourself.”

“Yes, it’s all thanks to everyone’s exaggerated evaluations.”

‘Mithril’ is a name I hate. It made me believe there is a need to review the Imperial Army’s taste in naming, but at least it is really prominent.

For young elites, raising one’s fame will be helpful in making it big. But ‘the nail that sticks out will be hammered down’, so I should keep it within manageable range.

“You are too humble, I think the evaluation is really fitting... That’s right, let me ask your opinion on something.”

Sometimes, one's fame may contribute to making a first impression. After all, the Brigadier who seemed a little interested in Tanya was seeking her opinion, although it appeared to be on the spur of the moment.

"First Lieutenant, it's fine even if these are your subjective views. In your opinion, how do you think this war will develop?"

As part of the conversation, they were discussing the war situation as soldiers. This was equivalent to making small talks for civilians. Chatting about a harmless topic in moderation wasn't wrong normally.

But the other party was interested in her. If she expressed her frank opinion, she would be able to display her competence to a certain degree. And of course, not saying anything stupid would be the minimum condition.

"Thank you for taking my thoughts into consideration, but which area are you asking about?"

That's why, ascertaining the intent of the other party while displaying her cautious and initiative was something needed to excel in her career. In the Army, superiors definitely prefer subordinates who will discuss details, and constantly communicate. Ask directly if there was anything they don't know. Such habits and the principle of report, contact and consultation were in a way, really suitable for the army. Most importantly, the organism known as the Imperial soldier was really stubborn in striving for accuracy.

Hence, instead of gunning for more points, it would be wiser to avoid losing any points. You wouldn't be able to make it big just by talking loudly. You need to pay attention to the small details and shout it out loud to be successful.

“Yes, you are right. Let me ask this in another way. What kind of form do you think this war will take?”

“I beg your pardon, but I don’t think this is something I can comment on.”

And she would need to avoid saying anything beyond her authority. For example, similar to how the Personnel Department shouldn’t comment on operational matters, the Operations Department shouldn’t interfere with the affairs of personnel matters. The key point is to know one’s own boundaries.

“It’s fine. This is not an inquiry, so you may speak freely.”

“I will do as you wish then.”

She didn’t want to say it. But if she continues to refuse, it would be rude. Her main concern would be being thought of as lacking the ability to explain herself. Thinking that the other party would understand even if one didn’t say anything was naive thinking, an absurd fantasy.

Humans have two ears and one mouth, which meant that if someone was willing to listen, you just need to use one mouth. Even though it was possible to communicate by stating the minimum amount of words, communication was impossible without first opening your mouth.

“I strongly believe it would develop into a great war.”

One of the basics of giving a report, stating your predictions confidently. Even if you want to be unique about it, you have to make sure the contents were solid. If you couldn’t convey the main points, a briefing would be meaningless.

“What is this great war you speak of?”

“It will probably involve most of the great nations, and develop into a war on the scale of the world.”

In this world, this conflict would probably spark off a world war. Even if it doesn't, it would definitely become an all out war between the great nations, calling it a great war wouldn't be wrong.

Going by common sense, this would definitely evolve into a world war. As the great nations fight each other for power, and all the countries would have to go all out. She had to show that she was knowledgeable enough to understand the situation, and leave a good impression.

“... What are you basing this from?”

“The Empire might be a new superpower, but compared to the great nations of the past, it is powerful even as a lone country.”

Next, she must give firm explanations. To avoid unnecessary meetings, the only solution would be to build consensus.

With regards to this, the Brigadier was really down to earth. Being this serious when talking to a mere Lieutenant, he was surprisingly broad minded. That was why, there was value in expressing her views.

“And so, the Empire would definitely win if we fight with other great nations one on one.”

“Hmm, we will definitely win the war against the Republic.”

And he would even help to say the words Tanya find it hard to articulate. Specifying the ‘war against the Republic’, meant that this might not be true for other countries. Thanks to the higher ranking person pointing out the existence of hidden enemies, the conversation progressed smoothly.

Tanya was honestly impressed, and felt she was more talkative than usual. This made her feel that the army where it was hard to choose their subordinates would be more thorough than corporations in making use of their subordinates’ capabilities.

She didn’t have this viewpoint when she was performing retrenchment in the Personnel Department office. The army was different from corporations, you couldn’t choose your subordinates, you could only nurture them.

“But it is hard to imagine that the United Kingdoms and the Rus’ Union would sit idly by, given the current situation. The Ildoa Kingdom has also not made their intentions clear.”

“... They can’t gain anything directly from this war.”

And he would seek confirmation and not take things for granted. Yes, wonderful, simply wonderful. This was an intellectual conversation. A dialogue that couldn’t take place if the other party wasn’t curious about her intellectual level. How delightful. This must be the charm of a man of society.

“Yes Sir, that’s true for direct gains. But on the other hand, they have to face the choice of allowing the birth of a hegemonic nation.”

“Hegemonic nation?”

“Yes Sir. In the central region of the continent, if the Empire destroys the Francois Republic, we wouldn’t just be relatively stronger than each nation, but would be absolutely domineering over the continent.”

Just imagine the German Empire defeating France and Russia by themselves. Would the British Empire be foolish enough to ignore this? If they really were that foolish, that island state would just be treated as a weak country in the sidelines.

They could understand the harshness of reality, that’s why they joined the fight. Even the great nations of this world enter a war for the good of the country.

“And so, if they couldn’t decimate the Republic in a short time, and do so by denying the other nations from interfering, it would definitely cause a chain reaction of other countries interfering.”

“I see. It might develop in such a way, but wouldn’t the Republic have a chance to become a hegemonic nation too? That would be hard for them to accept too right?”

Tch! Damn it, the other party helped to point out the flaws in her theory. If he did so because I look young, he must be pitying me. It would be dangerous if I fail again.

Let’s continue on. Look firmly in his eyes and answer clearly.

“I agree. I also think that they would plot to have the Empire and Republic kill each other off.”

“They will join the battle?”

“Yes. They will probably start by giving loans to the Republic, and will supply weapons and send volunteer fighters.”

This was the famous Lend-lease¹ program and raising war funds. Even if the Republic won the war, they would have exhausted their national resources. It was only natural to conclude that the United Kingdom would want to reap the rewards after the Empire and Republic had fun fighting their war.

“... I see, I can imagine that.”

“Correct, they are lending massive resources to the Republic with the intention of letting both sides kill each other, then swoop in at the end to harvest the fruits of their labour. I think that is what the other great nations are scheming.”

How horrible, countries were certainly an evil existence. It would twist good natured men into a minion of an evil organization. We should seriously look into the possibility that nations will twist the nature of humanity.

Take the disgusting Soviets and East Germany for example, their secret police had done great damage to human nature. Just look at how horrifying society was under the surveillance of Stasi². Pursue freedom, and strive for the freedom of one's

¹ **Lend Lease:** During times of war, the loan of weapons, resources, bases and land to ally nations. This might be a loan, but in the eyes of the enemy, the nation receiving aid still became stronger and would feel troubled. The country being aided have the obligation to pay back the loan, but just like the Soviets borrowing from the United States and refusing to pay them back, the lending party have to be prepared that the loan would be a loss cause.

² The **Stasi** were the German State Security Service in East Germany (1950-1990). They are described as one of the most effective and repressive intelligence and secret police agencies to ever exist.

mind! Liberalism was the only true path leading to the world's salvation, humanity had to realize that as soon as possible.

“And so, what should the Empire do to achieve overwhelming victory?”

“The other great nations would probably intervene as a matter of their national security policy. Even if they had no other choice, they would intervene alone.”

Even though the freedom of thought was important, she must not neglect this intellectual conversation. She had to think about the topic deeply and keep this dialogue going.

“I see, an interesting hypothesis. How should we deal with it?”

“There is no strategy that can resolve this.”

To be honest, I would have submitted it if I could think of any idea. That would be the chance for me to make it big, it was a pity that I lack the talent in such military affairs. Forget it, I will leave the creativeness in military operations to Napoleon and Hannibal. As a good person with a deep passion for peace, I don't have to be ashamed about this.

“So we should follow the lessons of history and strive for peace. If that isn't possible, then our priority will be to keep our losses down.”

“... You are not trying to win? Your heavy words might make others suspect your will to fight.”

Oh no, damn it. I slipped my tongue. I was blabbering on like a college professor. And I made improper comments that made my fighting spirit seem suspect before the Deputy Chief of Logistics. Did I really say that? It was such a serious lapse that I want to shoot my own mouth with a gun.

This might hurt my resume. No, I once heard that cowards would be treated cruelly in the frontlines. This is terrible, terrible. I must look unmoved, and use a calm tone to indirectly express that wasn't what I meant. I have to make a brave speech to display my fighting spirit, or it would be dangerous.

“Yes, the literal meaning is as you say, Brigadier Sir. But it is not impossible to seek victory. The issue lies with how the problem is defined, we should expand on the conditions first.”

“And? Please go on.”

“Yes Sir, I believe we should define victory for the Empire as realizing our national defence objective without losing the war.”

“Well then, what needs to be done to achieve the victory you speak of?”

“Implement operations to bleed the enemy out, and crush their ability to continue fighting completely.”

She used terms preferred by soldiers, such as implement, completely and crush. She made a show of her morale being high as she sought out a more practical way of saying it.

“You intend to destroy the entire army fielded by the enemy?”

Destroying the deployed enemy army? That was an ideal method, but hard to implement. Which meant that his question was a bait. To let him know she didn't suggest a forceful method just to appease him, she needed to refute it.

“That is an ideal way, but it is probably hard to accomplish. Our goal should be for the enemy to deplete their resources and make it a positional warfare.”

“Can we win then?”

“I can't tell, but we will definitely not lose. If we will conserve the power to deal a fatal blow, it will increase our tactical flexibility.”

She couldn't be sure this method would win, but she doesn't think it would lose either, that's the limit of her answer. She added the term “fatal blow” for insurance too. She had to keep mentioning the terms that emphasized her intention to defeat the enemy.

“Hmm, very interesting. But the opponent will adopt the same strategy one day, what then?”

At this juncture, she could only show her enthusiasm. Since he displayed a certain level of interest in her, the last impression she would leave on her would be deep. In that case, she had to display the largest extent of her aggressiveness, and muddle the dangerous fact that she lacked the will to fight.

“Yes, considering the situation, I will suggest switching the main mission of infantry to defence, and Mages to launch attacks.”

“I think that Mages are capable of dealing destruction and impact, but they are not the branch of soldiers suitable for invading and occupying enemy grounds.”

“I concur. However, the goal of launching attacks is not to gain grounds, but to destroy the enemy soldiers.”

In other words, this wasn't about gaining ground and keeping them, but a strategy that focus on depleting the enemy's numbers. In the face of total war, the most important part was to identify the only way to win. They had to destroy their opponent's ability to continue the war, and do their planning with that objective in mind.

On the battlefield, Germany which was tactically superior to other nations slaughtered the Russians and dealt painful blows to the British alliance. However, they were still defeated in the end, and the biggest reason was that they had exhausted their national power. When they fought against Britain, France and America at the same time, the German high command understood that victory was impossible and decided to surrender.

Even though their frontlines remained intact, they conceded because they realized they are unable to keep fighting on. This event was an important lesson in history. This was how a total war could fail. No matter how strong the frontlines were, they couldn't keep it up if their national power was exhausted. Because this wasn't a problem of mentality, and simply was the limit to the law of physics.

“That's why I believe, we should make the Aerial Mages our main offensive force to harass the enemy and conduct direct penetration attacks to tire our opponent.”

To be honest, a direct penetration attack was a crazy move, but it was possible to accomplish it with mages. Even though the chance of it working was low, there

were merits in proposing it. Since she wasn't the one who would do it and was just talks, she could say all she wanted. Just take a look at Tsuji.

That idiot did so many ridiculous things in the Manchuria, yet still got promoted after returning to his home country. Or that general who insisted on carrying out the Battle of Imphal! Also known as the best agent of the allies, reckless-ya or general Demon-ya. No, maybe I should call him 'General Just-die-you-fraud'?¹

Telling others to die, then use it as an excuse to rob peace offerings? Hmm, that didn't sound right, I can't really remember. Well, never mind. If I could be that irresponsible, my life wouldn't be so hard.

Regrettably, I'm a kind person. I had not given up on being human, and from my personal experience, I might be able to achieve it.

Sigh, I am such a sensible person. It wouldn't be a stretch to call me the gathering point of goodwill. Yes, there wasn't any doubt of my justice. Kind and craving for peace, a person with a healthy personality who has it hard in life, that's about it.

“Hmm? The Mages are not performing support duties?”

“With firepower equivalent to an artillery on the ground and mobility that exceeds infantry, Mages are the ideal type of soldier to hunt enemies.”

¹ **Mutaguchi** was then made commander of the Fifteenth Army from March 1943, and strongly pushed forward his own plan to advance into Assam, leading to the Battle of Imphal. After the failure of the Imphal offensive in late 1944, Mutaguchi refused to allow his divisional commanders to retreat, and instead dismissed all three of them. Some 50,000 of Mutaguchi's 65,000-man force died, most from starvation or disease. With the complete collapse of the offensive, Mutaguchi was himself relieved of command and recalled to Tokyo. He was forced into retirement in December 1944.

To be honest, doing mobile defence was tough. When forced to fight against Named, I could feel how difficult it was to battle someone addicted to war. If gods were real, I will wipe all of them out and proclaim to be a god. A race that likes to kill their own kind was crazy anyways.

This also proved that existence X wasn't a god. Sigh, how do I escape from the palms of a devil? If a devil wanders in a world without god, that would really be the end of the world.

"If we wish to achieve victory and minimize our losses at the same time, we should focus on curbing our losses. In that case, mages would be the most suitable force to deploy."

"I see, you are good at promoting your point."

"You flatter me."

I should back off a little here. But his reaction wasn't bad. He just shrugged and started writing on his document, showing no sign of faulting me. That's great.

Since I could fudge through all that with just my mouth, I should consider being a negotiator. However, my expertise still lies in people management. But compared to general and shallow work, in-depth and niche jobs paid better. What should I do?

In order to plan for my life after the war ends, maybe I should learn a skill. In that case, I should earn a qualification. I have plenty of experience as a mage and could fight anyone at a moment's notice. Trying to get a mid-career change with just this on my resume, I would only be qualified to be in a mafia. No matter what era it was, discharged soldiers would face problem in finding employment. Therefore, it would be a problem if she didn't invest in her education. That's why she would

visit the library to learn about legal matters, in order to earn a qualification as an attorney or something in that field, so she wouldn't starve in the future.

"Then assuming we will use mages as the main forces with minimizing losses as the overarching policy, how large a scale would it need to be?"

It was probably her fault for being distracted by her future life plans. She didn't think too deeply about the meaning behind these words and answered casually.

"I think an entire Wing would be adequate in scale. This would be a small burden on logistics, but it would have the minimum combat power to be effective."

"Interesting. Yes, I will consider it. The ideas of the young ones are always so interesting."

"Thank you for your compliment."

It was simply her mistake to not realize this. If it was the usual Tanya, she would definitely detect something was wrong with that conversation and do her best to avoid this situation. But because of her carelessness, she overlooked this. That's right, her negligence led to the most terrible mistake of her life.

Imperial Capital / At the desk of Deputy Chief of Logistics inside the General Staff Office

During the times when he was lost in thoughts, Brigadier General Zettois was often capable of gaining enlightenment from lessons of the past.

Although it was inevitable his behaviour would result in criticisms stating he acted too much like a scholar rather than a soldier, Zettois was the type of person who preferred to learn from history. The various types of military tactics and doctrines that were created from the past, many of them still possessed useful components which are relevant even in today's time. This was his reason for studying them.

And it was precisely because of his interest in history that had allowed Brigadier General Zettois to sense an indescribable feeling of change which was starting to occur on a fundamental level across the battlefronts. This was something that he had previously picked up from studying history, the feeling that the incoming tide was about to reach its turning point, and the sense of wrongness in the paradigm which the Empire had adopted as part of its national defense strategy when faced with the current situation.

Using history as an example of a non-conforming guideline, it revealed that a major shift in the delicate balance of power could soon be expected to happen, marking the arrival of a new era.

Just what exactly will be changed? Difficult questions such as this would only be considered as an unnecessary distraction by the majority of the soldiers in the Imperial military. After all, in the eyes of the common soldiers, dealing with what was currently in front of them was more important. In this case, considering the traditional thinking of the Imperial Army that only focus on carrying their own mission, Zettois was a deviant.

However, despite his academically inclined personality, he still proved himself with excellent results. Since he had proven to be an exemplary officer, the Imperial Army didn't hesitate on welcoming in such a talent.

Even the General Staff Office saw Brigadier General Zettois in a different light.

The sight of him deep in thought at his desk was now a famous scene, and no one would disturb him without reason. For the staff working under Brigadier General Zettois, they had already gotten used to him flipping through philosophical books in deep thought after finishing his task.

Ever since the war started, they had been overwhelmed by the atmosphere of panic. But with the western and northern frontlines stabilizing, they had time to take a breather.

Even the staff officers of the General Staff Office who hadn't had a day off since the war started were granted a short leave to take a break. The overjoyed young staff officers all 'attacked the bars with high spirit' to splurge the salary they hardly get to use while the older staff officers returned home to enjoy time off with their family and rest.

The thing in common with everyone was that they all enjoyed this long overdue holiday, and spent it happily.

But this day, the staff officers came back from their break to see their boss staring at the notes he scribbled with bloodshot eyes and not moving at all. The duty officer who stayed behind informed the baffled group that Brigadier General Zettois had been staring at the notes in his hands ever since he returned from his trip to the War College.

“General Zettois?”

The officers who couldn't watch any longer tried talking to him casually. But his bloodshot eyes continued to scan the notes on his desk. That was all Zettois could do to digest the shock he felt.

In the beginning, he only thought about it as ‘an officer who mentioned some interesting ideas’. Even the suggestions he noted down was just another way of viewing the situation to him.

As he thought about things on his way back to General Staff Office, he started feeling that the conflict between the External Mobilization Strategy and the Internal Mobilization Strategy would keep expanding, and was impressed by this opinion.

However, as he delved deep into thought, the rational side of him gradually grasped something. And when he realized it, no matter how unwilling he was, he had to accept that the notes he tossed onto his desk contained a terrible truth.

It happened to be a prediction of how the war would develop that eluded even the General Staff Office. The explanation was shockingly clear, and showed deep understanding on how dramatic the war would change. As far as Brigadier General Zettois knew, even Brigadier General Rudelsdorf who astutely hinted that the trend of the war was changing probably didn't understand it so completely, yet First Lieutenant Degurechaff said it with such certainty.

A World War —— Total warfare was unavoidable. If someone else heard this, it would just be treated as unfounded worrying. But Zettois could sense that she was expressing something similar to the future revolution hinted by the Union and the Imperium in the far east. She completely grasped a certain ‘something’ that Zettois and Rudelsdorf felt.

Even though her ideas were filled with delusion, it was strangely convincing.

Her certain tone seemed to be saying that she had already seen it with her own eyes. And Zettois had no choice but to accept her understanding and analysis which her confidence was based on.

When he realized it, several staff officers were looking at him with concern. It was the basics of officers to not lose one's composure before one's subordinates. The impact of what he learned far exceeded the anxiety he was feeling, and still rippled in his mind.

He didn't even feel like saying 'I'm fine' to smooth things over. Brigadier General Zettois abruptly stated his honest thoughts.

"Gentlemen, I'm thinking about a world war. Do you think a war against the world will break out?"

"Huh?"

His subordinates showed an expression that seemed to be saying 'what?' Seeing all their faces becoming worried at the same time, Zettois couldn't bring himself to say his unbelievable idea. But Zettois' experience and knowledge made a judgement, telling him that the terrible future thought up by that young head was an 'appropriate prediction'.

That's right, it was something said by a child, a child more suited for laughing cheerfully. But Brigadier General Zettois knew that he couldn't just laugh it off as the playful words of a child.

He heard about that officer's experience during the War College candidate selection process... Maybe he should describe that young girl this way. He happened to encounter her at the War College, chatted with her with the intention of testing her out, but ended up opening Pandora's box.

"My apologies, I couldn't explain the specifics. However, I want all of you to evaluate this possibility."

"... That is a rather extreme prediction."

This was an order he issued himself, but he understood how his subordinates felt. This was to be expected, as Zettois himself had never considered the possibility of the Empire waging war against the entire world.

There should be a limit to how extreme he gets. Views thinking that this was too extreme was logical. But the more Zettois thought about it, the more possible he realized it was.

He felt that it was impossible. He thought he could find a flaw in this theory somewhere.

But assuming—since this is just an assumption—assuming... her ideas were right, then the Empire had to literally fight a war with the entire world.

If that happens, it wouldn't be bad to hand a Wing to her as promised. If Zettois couldn't win the war by delving into insanity, then he would do just that.

"... I don't want to become a detestable adult."

However, Brigadier General Zettois was stunned when he realized what he was thinking. Sending a child to the battlefield? That was the greatest shame for a soldier. And he just made that assumption as if that was only natural.

... Ah, I really hate my incompetence.

The post of senior staff officer was the expert on ‘military’ matters. But they were not just an expert. On top of being an expert on military affairs, they had to be well learned in other related areas too. That was the capability the Imperial Army asks of their senior staff officers.

The minimum criterion was to be familiar with the environments in the battlefield and in the backline. And so, for officers on the path of the elites, reassignment was a process they encounter frequently.

In the General Staff Office, Major Lehrgen who headed the crucial post of Section Chief of the Personnel Department was already used to being transferred. After all, even the critical position of a Personnel Affairs Section Chief was simply a stepping stone towards to his next post.

And Major Lehrgen displayed his extraordinary observations of various departments during the War College conference, and received high evaluations even in the General Staff Office. However, it wasn’t because of the doubts he raised against a candidate, but for his knowledge of working with other departments.

No matter what, there would never be enough multi talented individuals during times of war.

So shortly after, he received notification about his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. For Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen who was promoted earlier than the norm, General Staff Office assigned him as the executive officer for the General Staff Office's Operation department.

Even though he had no fixed assignments, he could execute the commands of his senior officers, and partake in the setting of policies for the entire military. His position was a reflection of the high evaluation that was given to Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen. The moment he reported to his post, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen had the taste of being worked really hard by his superiors, as per tradition.

This was the General Staff Office, the organization responsible for the central planning of the Imperial Military. Situated in the best property within the capital, the General Staff Office was a place of tranquility, as befit its long history. But contrary to how it looked outside, it was chaos within.

“Congratulations, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen, welcome.”

“Thank you for your kind greeting, General Rudelsdorf Sir.”

“Don't mention it, I will be working you as hard as a horse. Right now, I could use as many people as I could get. Here, take a seat.”

Lehrgen was congratulated on his promotion. Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen who received his promotion orders walked through the front door of the Operations Department with all his bags, and the one who welcomed him was the Deputy Operations Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Rudelsdorf. Even though the heavy

workloads in the General Staff Office were well known, Brigadier General Rudelsdorf still smiled energetically, and sat him down as if he didn't want to waste time.

And the instant Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen sat down, Brigadier General Rudelsdorf got right into topic as if he was in a hurry.

“Alright, Lieutenant Colonel. This might be abrupt, but here are your assignment papers to report immediately to the northern frontlines.”

He already knew that Rudelsdorf was known for his quick decisions, but Lehrgen didn't expect him to send someone who just reported away immediately.

“As you know, the strategic planning is a mess, and is affecting the northern frontlines deeply.”

However, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen was proud of the Staff Officer epaulette he was wearing on his shoulders. He adapted to the situation immediately and concentrated in order to not miss out on the intent of his superiors. He spent a very short amount of time to focus on listening.

“This is a battle initiated by us which we had never considered before, an offensive after a major mobilization. It was inevitable that it would fall into chaos.”

The Imperial Army was paying a heavy price for misjudging the situation. The tension in the west was still escalating, and the negative effect of a huge operation in the north which they had never envisioned before was devastating.

It was easy to imagine how the repercussion affected various factors, resulting in the problems faced by all deployed units.

The strength of the Internal Mobilization Strategy was its rapid movement of troops within their home territory. However, it would not work as effectively as intended if the conditions were not perfect. So if the situation turned bad, it was natural that they would fall into chaos.

“There was nothing more cruel and useless than to let someone who couldn’t do their job continue to collect their pay in a position they are not suitable for. And so, the ones responsible had been replaced.”

As a result, many of the staff officers within General Staff Office that supported the plan to launch the attack had been replaced and demoted. And of course, that didn’t include the staff that didn’t commit any major mistakes and performed their duties as tasked. That might be so, there wasn’t any doubt that the situation made it easy to promote capable talents as part of the reorganization process.

The quick promotion of Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen and his posting to a key role within the General Staff Office was thanks to this.

“And we ended up short handed, how ironic. But this also provides a stage for officers like you to perform. That is why I want you to make a trip to the north.”

“Are my orders to go there and evaluate the situation?”

Considering the situation, despatching him north as the Operations Executive Officer from General Staff Office meant sending him to perform an inspection. The intent of this order was to gather more information for the making of long term decisions. Even the newly appointed Staff Officer understood this instantly.

Going by tradition, the Empire will break through the battle on both fronts by falling back on their basic strategy. The high ups were probably trying to make a decision whether to prioritize the western or northern front first.

“That’s right. With the western front becoming highly unstable, we really don’t want to fight on both sides at the same time.”

“You wish to know which side we should settle first?”

“Correct. After you have finished your inspection in the north, head straight west to inspect the front lines there.”

The Brigadier nodded satisfactorily. From his reaction, he seemed very pleased with Lehrgen’s answer.

“Yes Sir, I will go to the north immediately.”

In order to move immediately to carry out their orders, the Executive Officers in General Staff Office would prepare a bag with change of clothes at their work desk as their duty required it.

Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen mimicked what his seniors did, and carried a bag with spare clothes as per tradition and entered the Operations Department after receiving his assignment orders. But it was a fact that Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen didn’t expect to use it so soon.

“Very good. Ah take a look at this on your way there, Colonel.”

“What is this?”

“A thesis Zettois gave me. It is good for reference.”

“Understood. I will take my leave then.”

Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen then left immediately, heading straight to the train station via a staff car. He boarded a train heading north, which set off shortly. Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen entered a first class cabin exclusive for senior officers that was pre-booked. He then looked at the title of the thesis that was handed to him.

It was ‘The form of the current war and prediction on its development’. The scholarly face of Brigadier General Zettois flashed through his mind for an instant. The subject title made him nostalgic about the war history lessons he attended. Brigadier General Zettois was famous for falling into deep thought often, even Lehrgen himself heard about that.

Brigadier General Rudelsdorf must have found the thesis interesting, that was why he recommended it to me. That was what Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen assumed, but as he read the thesis handed to him, his vision that was following the words started to blur. Not just that, as he read deeper into it, his face twisted in shock. He felt as he was hit hard in the head because of the emotion of fear and horror washing over him.

“... What is this?”

This was? The current war? No, ultimately, was the development described in it possible? Lehrgen’s heart was filled with doubts.

... *It’s possible.* He affirmed the answer as an expert of the subject material.

As far as he knows, Brigadier Zettois wasn't an officer who would make such a far fetched theory. In fact, he was a cautious person. It was the common consensus in the General Staff Office that Zettois had the tendency of discerning the truth through analysis. In short, the Brigadier who was an academically inclined realist was warning about a world war. It was too preposterous. How happy Lehrgen would be if he could just laugh it off.

However, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen could only hold his head and groan, having no choice other than facing reality. The discussion about strategies in a war was always accompanied by the opinions of many others, and as a Staff Officer, he understood the dilemma between the Internal Mobilization Strategy and External Mobilization Strategy

It was easy to understand by thinking about how the enemy would counter the Empire's Internal Mobilization Strategy.

"In that case, the war this time would definitely evolve into a world war?"

The Empire was surrounded by the great powers. Because of the geopolitical constraint of their territory, the national defence of the Empire was very fragile, which was a major headache. That was why the empire still felt their position was precarious even though it possesses stronger military might than the great powers around it.

But for the countries that surrounded the Empire, it was understandable for them to be concerned about their safety because of the existence of the powerful Empire.

It was natural for them to form a united front against the Empire, and disperse the military might of the Empire with the External Mobilization Strategy that encircled the Empire to achieve a balance in power, which was a predictable outcome.

This loose chain was the threat to the Empire. In order to break out of the encirclement net that was like a rope around its neck, the Empire came up with the Internal Mobilization Strategy.

They also worked hard on long term diplomatic affairs, forming an alliance with Itoa Kingdom and signing a nonaggression pact and other treaties with the Rus Union. This was meant to create a diplomatic atmosphere that made it hard for any nation to spark off a war because of regional conflicts.

But was that all? Let's assume the Federation dropped out of the frontlines, then Francois which had disputed territory with the Empire would need to handle the pressure from the Empire alone.

It was hard to tell if the cunning United Kingdoms would be willing to treat Francois as equals. They would probably provide support to maintain the power balance, but keep it to the minimum, with the intention of letting the Francois Republic and the Empire destroy each other.

Since this point was highlighted, it couldn't be denied that there was a possibility of the war spreading due to chain reaction. Due of its communist governance system, Rus Union's long-standing alliance with Francois Republic fell on bad terms. Using this chance, the Empire signed a nonaggression pact with Rus Union. For Francois, this meant they had no choice but to place their hopes on the Federation to rein in the Empire with their secondary battlefront.

From the perspective of the Empire, this was the reason why they had no choice but to fight the Federation and the Republic at the same time. Worse of all, 'the Republic and Empire destroying each other' was the only way the other great powers would allow the war to end... They would not allow a domineering country to win and gain supremacy over the other surrounding nations.

The wisdom and experience of Lehtinen allowed him to hear the door towards 'world war' creaking open. It told him that this was very possible.

And then, when they fight the entire world in a war. The concept of 'Total War' seemed to be smiling at him like a witch, the image of the sneering woman entered his mind naturally.

The concept of 'Total War' refers to the necessity of a nation at war to mobilize all civilian resources.

He had the urge to refute them, but the theory described in the thesis was based on hard facts.

The changing of the very nature of war, and the intense increase in ammunition and fuel consumption. He had confirmed all this through observation during his time in the General Staff Office. These were undeniable facts. Especially the army on the western front that confronted other great powers in direct battles, the consumption on their weapons and ammunitions had already surpassed their pre-war estimates.

The heavy sacrifice of combat personnel? That's right, it hit the mark too. He heard that the replacement rate had reached its limit for a few units. The number of deaths had exceeded their prediction, resulting in a gap in the reinforcement plans that were in place.

A war that would consume weapons and soldiers heavily. The tremendous manpower cost, and the waste of resources because of the breakdown of the national economy. That's right, human lives were consumables. Not a sacrifice, but being 'consumed', the toll was represented by a number. What an insane

competition. This match will continue until one side couldn't bear the burden anymore and collapses?

The thesis described a state of war where the continuous consumption of personnel and resources would continue until one side gets destroyed. And this would be carried out on a global scale. This prediction could only be called a grand delusion.

If he acknowledges this prediction, what awaited him was a horrible world where human lives were treated as a number, a resource to be consumed. But the theory included very logical parts. And when he thought about what it meant to affirm this theory——

No, that was only natural. As theories, Total War and World Wars had many aspects that could be criticized. But even so, it felt really realistic. An existence that was hard to deny even if you wanted to.

But why is that? Why can't I refute it? There is a feeling of something being off, stuck in my throat.

“... What exactly is this feeling that something is wrong?”

As if he had experienced Total War and World War before. No, it was impossible for him to encounter it, but he had such an impression. Or rather, he had an impression of this strange feeling.

“Where did I... No, did I forget something? No, there is something that bothered me.”

Had he seen this thesis before? No, that's not it. It was the first time he saw the terms Total War and World War. He only knew about them now.

Or a similar concept? He shouldn't have any memory about that. The closest concept he could think of would be something he read in a science fiction novel. Then, was it something he experienced before? But he didn't have much experience in the frontlines.

He was stationed at the battlefield before he made First Lieutenant, but ever since his assignment as a Military Attaché to the United Kingdom, he had been serving at the rear lines. In that case, did he hear about this in the United Kingdom? He had written a mountain of reports about the United Kingdom, and he remembers all of them. But he doesn't recall reading about such a concept... *Am I overthinking this? No, I must have seen this somewhere.*

Even though they were at war, no, because they were at war, they needed competent Staff Officers. That was why the Empire invested so much money on the training of Staff Officers. As a Staff Officer, First Lieutenant Degurechaff was participating in a Staff Officer tour as per training tradition.

The Macritchie hot springs, a renowned vacation spot. Even though this was a famous town known for its therapeutic hot springs since olden times, it was situated in the mountainous region covered in snow all year round. In the mountain close enough to see the peaceful town, Tanya's figure could be seen among the War College Cadets that were exhausted both physically and mentally.

During the War College selection, she was the only female and child. And in reality, even if she didn't saw it from her mental perspective, she couldn't deny it from a biological standpoint. With the culture that blindly promotes the concept of 'ladies first', Tanya enjoyed a lot of privileges over her fellow cadets thanks to being a woman.

For example, when they stayed the night during a march, the other cadets couldn't even sleep in a building, and had to dig a shell scrape to rest. But the higher ups were worried about their appearance to the public, and permitted her to borrow a bed from a family there to spend the night. On top of that, she could use the local military related facilities.

Simply put, except for mages, the military was a male dominated society. In actual fact, most of the mages were also men. And of course, the Imperial Army would enforce the treatment of female officers in strict accordance to the law. The Military rules and regulations were very detailed as was the style of the Empire, which also detailed what rules the female soldiers had to follow.

That might be so, but before the appearance of mages, the very rarely seen female soldiers were all royalties. With such preconceptions, the seriously outdated regulations were written on the assumption that the female soldiers would be princesses and their servants. However, the rules had been amended heavily for mages frontline in recent times to be more practical for combat, since royals would never be assigned there. Even so, the treatment of female officers in the backline was still rooted on the idea that they were nobles or royals, and the book of regulations were full of archaic rules and etiquette.

And since the number of female cadets in the War College was drastically low, nobody took the effort to change the regulations for the College. As a result, the rules assuming female cadets were royalties got retained. The rules that were outdated by decades, maybe centuries, were still in effect if it doesn't get abolished or amended by the Empire. It was a flaw of bureaucracy, for you didn't have a choice of ignoring a rule that favours yourself and that's how the law in the Empire worked. Therefore, Tanya's tour was like a stroll on a red carpet when compared to the other cadets.

The objective of this tour was very simple. With one's mind was pushed to the extreme, the cadets had to carry out endurance training and practical study. The

plans formulated by Staff Officers on the fly when they were exhausted would be paved with land mines, even Tanya understood that fact. Therefore, in the eyes of the War College instructors, the experienced First Lieutenant Degurechaff who had the adequate physical capability did not need any handicap afforded to females. And the antiquated regulations for female officers didn't state anything about the treatment of 'Mage Officers'. In other words, they might not be able to ignore the rule about 'providing adequate accommodation for female officers', but there weren't any problems with Tanya joining the march as the rule 'female Mage officers couldn't carry a heavy load'.

And so, using the reason that Mage Officer could tap into the power of Operation Orbs, she was mandated to carry a dummy heavy machine gun, and participate in the Staff Officer tour in full battle gear. Not just full battle gear, she had to take a 50kg heavy machine with her on her hike. If Tanya could resist the urge to cry 'child abuse', there would be no problems legally.

Naturally, they didn't take the scenic sightseeing route, but traveled in the training zone on the mountains. This confirmed her belief that the one who proposed her training policy was a sadist. Even hikers in light gear would cry in despair, and they are making her climb it in heavy armour.

Despite all that, speaking about the goal objectively, this method wasn't wrong.

Their purpose is just to make the candidate the cadets tired right? She couldn't help thinking.

"Victor, assuming the enemy have set up fortification on that hill. And your battalion has to advance swiftly."

However, the Staff Officer training was conducted very thoroughly. They would mercilessly quiz the exhausted officers on how they would handle a simulated battle scenario.

“Please propose a plan to proceed.”

Fortification on a hill? From such a precarious position, there would be no way of breaking through or going around it. They could either withdraw with a heavy heart, or destroy the enemy position with heavy artillery from afar. Another way would be to send mages to charge in.

“Breaking through would be difficult. In order to advance quickly, I would propose going around them.”

However, First Lieutenant Victor seemed to be tired, and could only judge that taking the position would be impossible. So he advised the textbook answer of bypassing the enemy. Breaking though did seem unlikely in this scenario.

But bypassing them would likely fail too. After all, there wasn't any cover, and the enemy held the high ground. They would be sitting ducks before they could make it through.

“If you can do it, then show me.”

“Huh?”

“If you can go around them under such difficult terrain then show me how! You retard! Look at the terrain!”

As expected, the angry roars of the instructor became more intense. But Tanya couldn't spare the effort to gloat at the failure of others.

"Degurechaff, what would you do?"

Damn it, you owe me a meal, First Lieutenant Victor. If you could answer, no one would be lectured. Tanya wanted to glare at him, but if she looks as if she was panicking, she would suffer the wrath of the instructors.

Even though Victor was useless, he could still be a nice lightning rod. Lightning rods should be used, and shouldn't be broken. Tanya decided to tide over this difficult task honestly.

"May I ask if there is any heavy artillery support?"

First would confirm the basics. It would be hard to imagine an infantry battalion traversing such mountainous terrains to have artillery with them. If there were artillery from their parent division around, they might receive support. Artillery attached to unit would do too, the first thing that needs to be done was to check for any supporting fire. *They will test me on the assumption that there is no supporting fire anyway.*

However, if she didn't confirm the cards in her hand, she would be lectured 'didn't you consider asking for artillery support?' She already knew, but that's how unreasonable they were.

"Assume there's none!"

"First proposal, withdraw by a large distance, then take detouring action along the other hills."

Since that was the case, she could only retreat to avoid unnecessary losses. Fortunately, depending on the route they choose, it wouldn't take too much time. The most important thing was to not launch witless attack. Ordering the soldiers to charge an enemy who had a clear vantage of the surrounding was reckless.

If Tanya was asked if she wanted someone who would give such an order to be a Staff Officer, she would answer no. No matter what, unless you have more soldiers than the enemy bullets, it would be impossible to defeat gunfire with mortal bodies.

“Assume you are pressed for time.”

“... Second proposal, attack with a combination of mages and infantry. The mages will destroy the fortification, the infantry will provide covering fire.”

This was the standard procedure for Aerial Mages to secure an enemy base. They would need to steel themselves for some degree of sacrifice, but it was much better than letting the infantry assault on their own. Most important of all, Tanya was an Aerial Mage. Since the question assumed that she was in command, it wouldn't be unreasonable to assume that the battalion has Mages attached to it.

This could be considered a sly answer.

“Very good. Then assume there is only infantry for the attack.”

“Hmmm? I can only send infantry for this attack?”

... *Was I tricked?* When she realized it, the order had been changed to attacking the fortification with just a battalion of infantry.

“That’s right. I will give you some time. If you don’t want to camp outside, then hurry up and answer.”

How demanding. If infantry can take down a base by themselves, wouldn’t positional warfare be a piece of cake? He wants me to launch an attack under such conditions?

No pioneers or Mages? That’s asking me to be a meat shield. No, there is no need to consider this.

“Instructor Sir, I think this assault mission is impossible.”

In an instant, the expression of her cadet mates changed. They were deep in thought, and were surprised that Tanya answered that it couldn’t be done. This was obviously an answer that would make the instructor’s mood deteriorated. Her words might even lead to a drop of her class ranking.

This feels terrible. If they want someone to answer, why not pick Captain Wooka who is competing with me in the class rankings? She wanted to hold her head and scream. But she was carrying a heavy machine gun with both hands, so that couldn’t be done.

“What do you mean?”

If they were as proficient in bayonet assault like a certain Japanese Emperor, and the enemy’s suppressing fire was weak, there might be some hope. But charging with bayonets at a Republic fortification would be suicidal. She considered the

possibility of a night assault with the battalion, but doing that in the mountains would probably lead to them being wiped out.

If they went that far, and the chance of success was so abysmal, then the answer would be ‘impossible’.

“What is the responsibility of a Staff Officer? In terms of the mission, to consider the obligation and duty entrusted to us. It is my duty to report that it couldn’t be done.”

So she had to prepare a way to avoid responsibility. Humans were a creature that could learn from their mistakes. When she spoke with a Brigadier General in the library in the past, she had the experience of saying the wrong things and didn’t intend to make the same mistake. She had to explain that she gave this answer not because she lacked fighting spirit, but out of her sense of duty.

“My responsibility is to seek the best possible strategy.”

Which meant that she was concluding the task was impossible from the perspective of a Staff Officer. That’s why she couldn’t carry out her orders. And of course, the job of Staff Officers was to formulate plans that could achieve victory. But if she needed a reason, there were tons of responsibility to use as excuses.

“We should avoid sacrificing our troops meaninglessly.”

If he scolds me by saying victory is more important than the lives of the soldiers, there’s nothing I can do.

But Tanya had to avoid being criticized for lacking fighting spirit at the very least, so this was the most adequate way of putting it. Valuing the lives of your soldiers, she had that repeatedly drilled into her head for unknown reasons.

Thinking back, the thing that baffled Tanya was the way they kept emphasizing that to her. If they think she couldn't understand the idea 'you can't choose your subordinates, so you have to nurture them', then it's a pity.

Anyway, her reason was perfect and righteous. She could answer this time with her chest held high.

“Based on the above reason, my answer would be to refrain from attacking.”

The eyes of her instructor seemed to have seen through her true intentions. But she didn't tell a single lie. Staring back with the same will was a skill all salarymen had to know. All that was left was to have the guts that won't lose to the murderous gaze of soldiers.

In short, half was to get used to it, and the conviction of her heart's freedom taking up the other half.

“Very well. I will take note of this. Alright, continue the march!”

Ehh, this will leave a record? Seemed like soldiers do not like a salaryman's thinking. Ehh, what should I do?

Even though she thought she had fudged through it, she couldn't help thinking that nothing good would come from leaving a record.

[chapter]

V

第伍章

始まりの大隊

Primeval Battalion



CHAPTER 5

Primeval Battalion

Military Headquarters, Conference Room One

“The situation in the west has finally stopped deteriorating.”

That day Brigadier General Zettois, who had a grasp of all related combat logistics gave his report in the Conference Room situated within the Military Headquarters. This report allowed everyone to feel at ease for the first time in ages, signifying that the harsh battle condition in the west was gradually stabilizing.

“Regarding the overall battlefield, we are still slightly suppressed.”

From the map displayed in the conference room, they could see the western forces holding their ground stubbornly. Although they were unable to react in time, allowing the Francois Republic to push their battlefield deep within the Empire's territory, they were still able to prevent the Republican forces from entering the Rhines industrial area. It goes without saying that the combat units at the frontlines were almost at their limit, and the troops were fighting all the while being covered with wounds. They were forced to make emergency transfers from the capital, and to commit their units into the fray in stages.

Even though the situation was easing up, the entire battlefield was still being suppressed. Some of the bases in the rear were already within range of enemy Mage assaults.

“On the other hand, the mustering and reorganizing of our main forces has been completed.”

The western army's resistance was tougher than the limits that were set by plan 315 and helped the Empire gain the extra time they needed. Within this period, the Empire managed to deploy their army, and reorganize the front line units.

And of course, there was a heavy redeployment of units from the northern front to the western front. But the large scale reassignment was constrained by the railways' operational capacity. In the end, the progress fell behind schedule

significantly. But on the grand scale, the regional armies received reinforcement from the army, and thus could regain control of the battle and reorganize their fronts.

“... In reality, they just managed to make it in time.”

However, the expressions of the Staff Officers showed were not that of relief. Brigadier General Zettois and the members of the General Staff Office that were present had the common consensus that time and a speedy reaction was a problem. Time, time, time. This was an element that was hard to avoid in a war.

Even though the redeployment of the army made it on time, the way the General Staff Office saw it, this was a dangerous period. The army that was formed on the foundation of rapid deployment through the Internal Mobilization Strategy spent a lot of time on domestic transport. This meant that their strategic options were not as flexible as they had predicted before the war.

In order to make up for this, they would treat the standing unit in the central as backup forces. However, the numbers from the western frontline showed that a few reinforcement units would be insufficient. Even with excellent reaction speed, the amount was still a big issue.

“As expected, we absolutely need to recommend for an increase in the number of units capable of immediate mobilisation.”

“The Operations Department also agrees that a freely available unit should possess a certain level of mobility and combat prowess.”

The essence of the problem was with the swift mobilization of the army. This was a consensus view in the military. To ensure smooth large scale movement, they hoped to adjust the timetable of the railroad. After all, the traditional tactic of the Imperial Army was to focus their prowess on a single front to achieve victory, speed was everything.

However at the same time, just like Brigadier General Zettois had advised and Brigadier General Rudelsdorf had concurred, they agreed that it was necessary to reserve a certain level of forces that could be deployed swiftly, and strongly urged for the creation of a strong quick reaction unit. If there was a chance that the large scale deployment of troops would not be able to make it in time, there would absolutely be a need for firemen to contain the fire just in case.

“Other than that, the Logistics Department proposed the research of a national defence strategy under the assumption that we would be fighting on two fronts.”

At the same time, they swiftly reviewed their foundational strategy. The risk of them achieving victory on one end only to have the other end falling apart had grown too large in the recent years. No matter how good it looked on the surface, the old strategy had reached the end of its usefulness. As a result, the officers of the Logistics department with Brigadier General Zettois at the head held strong suspicion towards the Internal Mobilization Strategy.

This opinion was questioning whether they should ‘change the fundamental assumption, and resolve ourselves to a war on two fronts?’ They feel that the concept of letting the local forces focus on defense while the continental army launches the offensive was no longer feasible.

“I’m not objecting to the research... But on the actual battlefield, we have to avoid a war on two fronts.”

And of course, it was military taboo to split one’s forces, this was an ironclad rule no matter what era it was. ‘Defeat the enemy on one side with all their might, then deal with the enemy on the other side’, this was the basis of the Internal Mobilization Strategy which had taken deep root within the General Staff Office.

Most importantly, in the eyes of Brigadier General Rudelsdorf and the Operations Department members, gathering enough forces with a combined military might that could easily crush the opponent enemy was the standard strategy that could not be denied.

“I agree that we should have a fallback plan, but the opinion of the Operations Department is that we should focus on avoiding such a situation.”

“Lieutenant General Rudelsdorf, that would be hard to achieve, considering the geopolitical elements of the Empire.”

“I can’t refute that, but the worse scenario for this proposal would be having inferior numbers on all fronts.”

After achieving regional supremacy, during the time they secure victory, the local forces would need to stubbornly stall for time. This strategy was born out of the

history of the Empire being surrounded by great powers and their geopolitical necessity. In a nutshell, if they had the power to fight on two fronts, they wouldn't need to work this hard in the first place.

“What if the situation doesn't allow it? The strengthening of our forces on all fronts was in a way unavoidable if we are to improve our Internal Mobilization efficiency.”

However, despite the significant size of the regional forces, it was still crumbling before the Republican army. If the continental army didn't make it in time, the western industrial area would be overrun. If the internal mobilization strategy fails to support one of the sides, it would be infeasible.

Therefore, the priority at the moment was to increase the capability of their defences, so the opinion of Brigadier General Zettois and the others might not be wrong.

“... Considering the current situation, it is very difficult to reorganize the army in broad strokes. Are there any other better alternatives?”

However, even during peacetime the reorganization of the army was a grand process. Asking headquarters to forcefully reassign units during an intense war would be going too far. This would be akin to changing all of the strikers and defenders in the middle of a soccer game. The best results they could hope for would only be a complete mess.

“Well then, I propose the formation of a quick reaction unit. Right now, we need to improve our response mobility, and deploy forces at the right time and place.”

The topic brought up was the formation of a quick reaction unit which was mentioned long ago. The wish for a highly mobile quick reaction force on the scale of an army was something which had been frequently advocated by many others. Especially the staff officers led by the Deputy Chief of Logistics Zettois, who had been pushing for it heavily as of late.

“Alright, the Operations Department agrees with this. But I have to say, this would be dependent on the scale.”

The Operations Department that would be putting the unit into active use also agreed, expressing that they acknowledge the need to improve reaction speed.

They thought the continental army could fill that role. However, the scale of the continental army was too large, so they could no longer fulfil that mission. If not for the heroic stand by the western forces, the western industrial areas would have fallen, and they would be drafting the terms of a peace treaty right now.

“On this point, I would like to highlight that the readiness of the quick reaction force from the western and central army are outstanding. The Logistics Department would like to propose the strengthening of our reserve forces by enhancing the central army.”

And so, Brigadier General Zettois suggested strengthening the central army's forces. Turning the reserve forces that would normally be dispatched during emergency situations into a permanent standing unit ready for deployment. This proposal would form an unutilized unit, which should typically be avoided in military practices, but in face of reality, they couldn't care that much.

“But we have to take the eastern and southern army into consideration during the formation of this unit.”

“What a pain. It is abnormal that only the western army is earning merits.”

“There would be a drop in the vacancies to War College via war merits recommendation, and lesser chance to be posted to central. There is no doubt that the regional army would find this hard to accept.”

Even the Imperial Army has to consider all sorts of problems that could occur during reorganization; the fact was that the western army had earned more merits and bonuses than the other regional armies because of the hard fight they put up. However, due to budget constraints, there was a limit to the bonuses and positions they could grant, so the other regional armies would be given less than the norm. A considerable portion of the officer's manpower allocation have gradually began to warp. Officers that were advancing ahead of their peers, and even their seniors in rank kept popping up. The eastern army also had to reluctantly give up some of their allocated slots for War College to the western forces.

“I don't want to take the consequences this will have too lightly.”

“That's true. Especially the eastern army that is losing out the most, their dissatisfaction is really strong.”

As mentioned by the Personnel Department, this was a development that their department did not wish to see. The eastern army was being neglected because of the merits earned by the western and northern forces. The soldiers who were enjoying the privileges in key positions for the defence of the eastern zone were suddenly facing a deterioration in their treatment. With their promotion delayed indefinitely, it was normal to feel dissatisfied and uneasy. It wasn't just the earning of war merits, they were also worried about being surpassed by their peers and juniors. The problem hadn't really surfaced yet, but their anxiety and frustration were becoming serious.

"The eastern army did not participate in the war against the Federation or Republic. They might be the ones keeping the peace in the east, but those who are just idling won't be looked upon favourably."

"The lack of battle experience would also be a problem. We need to achieve an adequate balance."

Other than that, how they feel was also a problem, but the imbalance in combat experience was a bigger issue. They couldn't fight a war with just the western army. They had to assume that the eastern troops would enter the war some day. If they just idly sit by before heading into war, it would be too much of a waste.

Even so, they couldn't draw out a large number of veterans from the intense battles of the west in order to educate the eastern army.

"So your intention is to use the eastern army as the foundation to set up a flexible unit?"

In that case, the most practical method would be to pick personnel from the eastern unit to form a quick reaction task force. Brigadier General Rudelsdorf of the Operations Department was asking the Personnel Department whether they should use personnel from the eastern army to do so.

They didn't have the means to let them experience war, but this was much better than letting the unit stay away from the atmosphere of war, Rudelsdorf's proposal was based on this judgement. Not only would this lighten the burden on the western army, it would allow both sides that were about to fight over the budget get along peacefully.

"I want to make this an experiment on tactical mobility too, on the scale of a corp."

Even so, proposals would always be accompanied by an adversary. Brigadier General Zettois and others might place heavy emphasis on the experiment on battlezone mobility, but resources were limited. Even if one agreed with their proposals, depending on the scale, it might be hard to accede to them. The division scale experiment they proposed in conjunction with the rail department was too extravagant during war times. It might be an idea that could revive the concept of a quick reaction army, but the opposition was very strong.

“I disagree. There are only two strategic reserve divisions in the east.”

In the perspective of the Operations Department that actively engages the units, there was no way they would agree to personnel being drawn away when reserves were limited.

“The scale is too big. We can’t allow the defences of the east to weaken.”

To them, when their predecessors organized the continental army which left the western forces weakened was a lesson. In the end, the tough battles experienced by the west was a failure of the national defence policy. Considering this point, even though they were far away from the battlefield, it would be dangerous if they drew too much people from the eastern army.

Aside from the main forces, the east’s reserve was only one corp. That was why they oppose taking any more units from the reserves that were already at bare minimum.

“How about taking men from both, the eastern and southern army?”

“That would have to wait until the situation in the north is resolved.”

If they could finish off the Federation to the north, they would be able to spare the effort. But the problem was, despite the continental army destroying the enemy main forces, they still needed time to suppress them. If they drew forces from the south and east at this time, that would be akin to putting the cart before the horse. There was no point in forming a unit that could reinforce any front that needed it if it would weaken the border defences.

“Well then, I want to experiment with something else. How about forming a wing of mages and placing them directly under the command of the central quick reaction force?”

The proposal raised by the Logistics department as the next best option, was actually the one they wanted to implement. The idea of a ‘quick reaction mage wing’ conceptualized by the department with Brigadier General Zettois leading the way, had already been submitted to the General Staff Office.

“You mean the ‘quick reaction mage wing’ idea? I agree with that proposal.”

If the experiment was limited to a scale of a wing, it wouldn’t affect the overall battle operations. From their perspective, although the usage of the mage wing would be incorporated as part of the overall tactics for an entire army, even if all of the members of the wing were to be withdrawn, the overall operation for the army could still proceed as normal.

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For this point, they very much welcome the making of a mage wing which could be deployed on the front line flexibly as part of their reserve forces.

“You want to draw away one full mage wing?”

“The eastern army would be able to spare them. More importantly, a mage wing is easy to transport by air, and fast to deploy.”

Some may worry about the weakening of the eastern army, but they would be refuted because of the fast deployment time. A mage wing consist of 36 men. It was easier to transport than an army company.

Even if the 36 men needed 45 days worth of regulation supplies, it wouldn’t strain the logistics too much. If necessary, they could leave from the west and deploy in the east within a day.

“... Well then, we agree with the experimental mage wing. Let’s place it under the direct command of the General Staff Office.”

It was unlikely for the proposal to be rejected in the first place.

“Let’s shelf the idea to set up a quick reaction division, and see how the mage wing performs.”

The formation of a quick reaction division didn’t pass through, but fortunately, the experiment was approved. Setting up the quick reaction mage wing would definitely aid the formation of the quick reaction division in the future.

“Alright, on to the next item.”

Seems like I can keep the promise. After feeling relieved, Brigadier General Zettois relaxed his shoulders secretly. He then focused himself on the next topic.

U.E Year 1967 June 23rd Londinum WTN press conference room.

There were many mysteries around the existence of the World War.

Especially information about the Empire, even though they were heavily affected by the chaos at the end of the war. There were speculations that the two armies committed many taboos, but these were still covered under deep veils of secrecy. I once covered that war as a war journalist with ‘World Today’s News’. Like many people from my generation affected by that great war, I wanted to know the truth.

I had no intention of passing judgement. It was just pure curiosity about what exactly happened. Along with the comrades who agreed with my thoughts, we sought to uncover the truth behind the war, and proposed in the editorial meeting in WTN to make a documentary.

To be frank, we didn’t know where to start, and I wasn’t sure what to do. But fortunately, my superiors and comrades who understand me were willing to lend me a hand.

However realistically speaking, we were still filled with doubts about where to start. What was the truth behind the war? Won’t it differ for each person? There were all sorts of opinions, and it was hard for us to decide on the approach. Even though several secret documents had been declassified, not only did they make it hard to understand the whole situation in detail, it brought further confusion.

Back then, we focused on the information that was declassified by the United Kingdom earlier. We started investigating the battle of Darca that happened near

the end of the war. This was seen as a diversionary attack, the southern battle which was widely discussed by the masses.

The sinking of the High Britannia flagship 'Hooter' of the 2nd fleet, along with the 7 vessels under its command in this battle was well known. Why was the fleet destroyed so suddenly? It must be the reason why the information was classified.

At first, we suspected that the United Kingdom wanted to bait the Empire with false information, that's why all their units were gathered at Darca. The assumption was that in order to conceal the main objective of the surprise attack against the Empire, the United Kingdom offered the 2nd fleet as the sacrifice.

Wasn't this classified in order to hide this truth?

We imagined that such a scheme happened on the battlefield. In fact, I had heard about this dirty affair when I was a war journalist, so we thought we could find evidence to support this theory. But after reading the declassified information with such assumption, our expectations were led astray.

"The worst day of the United Kingdom's navy, was caused by xxxxxxxxxxxx."

This was the only sentence that was declassified, and all personnel related to the military kept their peace and refused to answer.

At this moment, it was probably fate that an acquaintance related to this historical battle brought an interesting tidbit. He hinted to me that I could uncover the truth by analyzing the rumours from the battlefield.

The 11 redacted characters xxxxxxxxxxxx could be found on many battlefronts. Going by the way he put it, this might be a code word for a high level officer or spy. Referencing xxxxxxxxxxxx with tarot cards, we dubbed it the '11th Goddess' and began our investigation.

The results were astonishing. The '11th Goddess' appeared in almost all major battles within the Empire. It's first confirmed appearance was two years before the war, reported by the intelligence department of a certain country within the borders conflict zone. After that, we wondered whether the code referred to an intelligence agent or a spy.

However, we noticed something strange. Some of the people who experienced battle on the frontline had reacted to the name '11th Goddess'. They expressed that 'this is the worst joke I have ever heard.'

Did we lump together several things into one because they all coincidentally had 11 'x'? When we thought about that, we tried using the words to differentiate places, and calculated the number of 'xxxxxxxxxx'.

After that, we discovered the battle that had the most number of the redacted 'xxxxxxxxxx'.

Aerial battle in Rhine (also known as the key battle of the Great War). In the most intense battle zone where Rhine was feared as the place with '30% sky, 70% blood' hosted the bloodbath between mages in the sky.

Coincidentally, my colleague Craiger and I were both WTN war journalist who witnessed the aerial battle of the Rhines. Everyone must have heard about 'Rhine where the devil dwells', 'Graveyard of the Named', 'The battle where even silver will rust' and so on. The incredulous names might seem other worldly, but I was certain that it was all true. I could judge by experience that a real devil did exist on that battlefield.

For example, let's assume that we made quick friends with a mage in a bar. It wouldn't be a surprise if six short hours later, we attended the funeral of that mage who had been blown to bits. I experienced that three times.

'Over there, humans are no longer humans.' That's what an aerial mage officer who I got along great with said before dying in battle, I could still remember it as if it just happened. That battle was a congregation of the madness of men.

All sorts of report surrounding the battle of Rhine were covered in heavy veils of secrecy even now. Many of the things were probably the result of the abnormal conditions of that bloody world.

However, '11th Goddess' showed her absolute presence in the Rhine aerial battle. This piqued our interest. Even though we knew it would fail, we still asked the military about the details. They only told us the information we 'needed to know', the obstacle before us was tougher than we imagined. The officer who worked in the General Staff Office only said that in all earnesty.

He mentioned that he wanted the information to be made public after we were unable to contact him. Just when we were about to query him further, he was already uncontactable. Until this day, we still wrote in our memo that we couldn't contact him.

He wished to say just one thing anonymously, and here it was, as promised.

‘V600’.

We continued chasing after this riddle. In order to know what exactly happened during that crazy era.

(Author: Andrew, WTN field reporter)

Kriegel 3rd street Zolka restaurant

Originally, the classes in the War college were spread out and allocated a generous amount of time. And so during times of war, a lot of the lessons would be cancelled, and the content would lean towards practical battle application. Some of the trainees comment that the classes had improved in quality. Uga once experienced a two year course being trimmed down to less than a year, and found the content more gruelling than usual, so he agreed with this assessment.

He once thought that his talent would never lose to his classmates, but after training together with the group of brilliant stars, he felt that the world was really vast. But he felt really fortunate.

My parents never forced me down the career of a soldier, but when they heard I got into Officer Cadet School successfully, they were happy for me as if it was their own joy. The greatest happiness in my life was in meeting my wife that I wasn't worthy of.

My newborn was unbelievably cute too. I probably had the mindset to ask about things I would never notice in the past because I was now a father to a daughter.

In a serene restaurant near St. Gregorios Church. Just like what I enquired earlier, I saw the figure of a little girl ordering lunch with a rifle and Operation Orb sprawled on the table. According to my friend in the Military Police, she would dine here every Sunday.

According to him, this was the only restaurant near the church that allowed its patrons to enter with weapons.

“Captain Uga, such a coincidence to see you here.”

When I realized, First Lieutenant Degurechaff had noticed my presence by following the gaze of the waiter, and stood at attention to salute me. I returned her greeting and walked to her seat. After ordering something light, I gave him a tip and asked him not to come near us for the moment.

This wasn't a topic I could bring up easily in public.

“It's not a coincidence, I just heard that you are always here. Is now a convenient time?”

“Of course, please have a seat.”

Her uniform fitted her nicely and didn't look out of place on her, as she offered me a seat. To be honest, if Lieutenant Degurechaff wore casual clothes, I probably wouldn't be able to find her. That's how well she suited the uniform. She was a soldier worthy of the rank of First Lieutenant despite her age of eleven.

Aside from standard issue items, there wasn't anything worth mentioning among her personal belongings. If I really had to say, it would be the newspaper laid out on the table she was making annotations on, and the Londinum Times and WTN special report she was using as reference. It did occur to me that the language courses in the War College recommends learning the languages of neighbouring countries.

The Londinum Times and WTN from a neutral nation were excellent learning material that could be easily obtained. But these couldn't really be considered personal belongings.

“Captain, do you dine here often?”

She stopped annotating on the newspaper, and she probably didn't mean to, but her gaze sent a chill down my spine. She was a petite girl who was also one of the few prides of the nation, the Ace of Aces. But as a father, I couldn't suppress the urge to question her.

“Degurechaff, pardon me for asking, but why were you willing to join the army?”

“... Hmm?”

How should I ask this? Despite the myriads of thoughts in my mind, it would be meaningless if I ask in a too roundabout way. After troubling over it, what came out of my mouth was this blunt question. The query was too simple, which made it hard for her to understand my intentions.

I never thought I would see the puzzled face of Lieutenant Degurechaff. Even though she was known as the steel masked girl, her face still showed emotions. I thought she lacked expressions, but she still had a human side about her. It might be careless to do so, but that made me relieved.

“Oh right, I hope you don’t treat this as a question from a Captain, just something that a classmate is asking you.”

I didn’t want to hear the superficial words one would normally give to their superior, what I wanted to know was her real thoughts.

“Since you have such outstanding talents, there should be many career paths you could pursue. Why insist on joining the military?”

If she only had exceptional talent as a mage, there wouldn’t be many options for her. Since the army craves for excellent mages, if one possess the talent for combat, they wouldn’t mind the issue of age too much. So someone as talented as her might be forcefully conscripted by the army at such a young age. If that was all, she would just be treated as a weapon.

But even after her conscription, she would be given a deferment because of her age. However, she relied purely on her talents and made it all the way to War College. Just eleven years old, and she successfully became one of the honourable Twelve Knights of War College, although she was ranked last.

If she relied solely on her inborn magic power, she might just stop at the stage of being a weapon. But with her talent, she should have many options, be it in engineering or research. In fact, the Imperial College accepts students skipping grades, and would waive fees for exceptionally talented students, and would even grant them scholarships. There was no limits to the paths available to her.

“... My late father was a soldier.”

“Late... My apologies.”

When I heard the word ‘late’, I understood immediately. It wasn’t anything rare, the Imperial soldier had always been neighbours with death. No matter who it was, they might die at any time.

All those who passed away had their own family, and the kins they left behind.

“Please don’t mind. It’s a rather common occurrence now.”

However, Degurechaff smiled as if she didn’t mind. As if she had already gotten used to it. But I felt that it was a tragedy for her to understand this at such a tender age. Did she enlist for the sake of vengeance?

“I didn’t have other paths to take as an orphan. Orphans simply didn’t have the right to choose.”

However her answer was beyond my imagination, a completely unexpected response.

“But, if you can enter Officer Cadet School, couldn’t you receive higher education too?”

After all, she had the brains to overcome various obstacles and make it here at such a young age. From what I know, there should be many benevolent people who would be happy to help such a talented child. Why did she have no other choice?

“... Captain, pardon me for being blunt, your family background is really good right?”

“Not at all. I had a happy childhood, but my family is just average.”

My father was a middle ranking civil servant. My mother hailed from a plain family. We didn’t know any powerful people worth mentioning. At most, my grandfather was in the navy, and was happy that I joined the military.

However, what Degurechaff said next dealt an indescribable blow to me.

“Sigh, it makes me envious. Orphans don’t get to choose, and can only live one day at a time.”

From her tone, she seemed to be thinking about her days where she often starved. I didn’t say it out loud, but the air about her seem to be telling me of her pitiful past. The unbelievably heavy atmosphere made me lean back onto the back of my seat. When I realized it, I was already suppressed by her atmosphere.

“... The surviving kin of deceased soldiers should be able to claim death gratuity right?”

“Captain, I am a bastard child who never saw my mother’s face before. If not for the orphanage, I would have died.”

An orphanage affiliated with the church. I understood immediately. This might be an unfortunate beginning, but because the church saved her, that’s why she was so dedicated in visiting the church. Was that the reason why she prays so sincerely?

But, even so...

“I don’t know how to put this, you are still a child. You shouldn’t be a soldier anymore.”

Even though it was delusional to think one could quit the army during times of war, she shouldn’t give up on seeking other career paths. Soldiers were beings that get to eat free meals. That might be so, but they had to die when the time comes.

It was a tragedy for children to take on such work.

“... Captain Uga, are you questioning my abilities?”

However, Captain Uga only realized he had said something unnecessary when Degurechaff asked her question with a pale face. He carelessly slipped words of pity towards a soldier who held both fame and glory.

“I am not questioning your ability! I just feel that a child like you shouldn’t be on the battlefield.”

It might sound like an excuse, but those were my true feelings. The Lieutenant probing at me with her eyes was still a child. A young girl that should be protected. No matter who it was, they wouldn't want to send their daughter to the battlefield.

Just the thought of sending my newborn daughter to the battlefield was enough to make me insane. Her father who gave his life in defence of the Empire wouldn't wish for her to do that too. As a father, I was certain of that.

"This is military duty. As a soldier, this couldn't be helped."

But she said that without any hesitation as a soldier. She embodies these very words literally. This wasn't just some talk by a soldier about principles, but an entity that became a soldier with no other choice, whose ego was shaped into that of a soldier.

Then, where was her real self?

"Are you serious about this?"

However, I still asked, despite knowing it was meaningless. Yet her eyes were serious, determined to not misunderstand my true intentions. If it was a joke or a lie, she wouldn't have said it so firmly.

On top of that, she was a veteran of many battles, the weight of her words were completely different from people who didn't know how the battlefield actually was. Her firm conviction had been baptised by gunpowder smoke and lead.

"... Captain, for you to be speaking like this, has something happened?"

She probably found Uga's worries to be suspicious. To keep up appearance, Degurechaff raised this question to the other party before her, which made Uga feel ashamed.

"My child had just been born. I heard it is a girl."

"Congratulations, Captain."

Even though she congratulated me respectfully, her action that simply followed basic courtesy felt lonely to me. Instead of the love for the child, the

congratulations seemed more like a reaction to happy news. Her eyes seemed to be looking at a world that had nothing to do with her.

“Whenever I see you, I would often wonder if my daughter would need to take to the field too.”

She had already opened herself a lot, and I heard her frank opinion directly from her. But I couldn’t overcome the sense of wrongness that was hitting me.

“What is wrong with this society that sends children that should be cherished into battle? Don’t you think so?”

I wasn’t sure what I wanted to say. I could only express the emotions welling up within me in honest words.

I could feel her gaze seem to be seeing through something. To be frank, even I didn’t expect to lose control to such an extent. But since I said it out loud, I couldn’t run away anymore. In the end, Lieutenant Degurechaff who was observing me spoke slowly like a shrine maiden announcing the prophecy of the gods.

“... Captain, you are a person with common sense. I would advise you to resign.”

Her words turned our position around.

“I was wondering what you want to say. This is the time where we are needed to clean up the mess and avoid the flames of war from spreading to the next generation. It is too much to ask me to retire.”

“You are a person who was able to retain his conscience even after knowing war. If you were to resign, you definitely have the capability to become a powerful force elsewhere.”

You should do that. She clenched her petite hands placed on the tables as if she was emphasizing that—— *You should resign.*

“I am a soldier. I am nothing more than that.”

“No, Captain. You still hold your rationality. Allow me to advise you shamelessly as a classmate, you should retreat to the back before the curtains are drawn for this crazy stage play.”

“Such a thing wouldn’t be allowed.”

This was war. The situation that would allow me to stay idly behind a desk job was over. And I couldn’t abandon my comrades, my batch mates, my brothers in arms and leave shamelessly. I had sworn with my friends standing with me in formation that I would never leave just like that.

“Captain, to live on is also a battle. This too is for the sake of not sending your daughter onto the battlefield.”

“... I will consider it.”

I couldn’t refute her. Despite feeling against it, I couldn’t say anything more. I was suppressed by the aura of a eleven years old child. I had no words.

“There isn’t much time, please decide soon.”

“You are talking just like a staff officer.”

“That’s the only education I have been receiving.”

It seemed like I don’t have any more effort to spare. I was asking a War College trainee to not talk like a staff officer, that was absolutely meaningless. After all, the education we were going through intended to mold us into high level staff officers or advisors.

That should be a compliment instead. There wasn’t any other way that my words could be more wrong. Even I noticed it subtly, and was rather shaken.

“... I see. It is as you say.”

It is as you say — That’s all I could say. My vocabulary were really limited huh.

“Ah, our lunch is here. Let’s dig in.”

“... Yes, let’s eat.”

I met Captain Uga at noon, he seemed to be mentally shaken after his child was born. Yes, I agree with the theory that becoming a parent would induce psychological changes.

Anyway, Captain Uga would now drop out of the high flying path in War College. The fascist who dictated that one should convince the other party when they were mentally defenceless was definitely a demon like genius. This way, his evaluation would drop because of his wish to be stationed at the rear, and Captain Uga won't be stupid enough to protest. That way, my ranking as one of the top two graduates out of my batch of a hundred would be furthermore guaranteed. Thanks to this, even though it would just be for my generation, I would be addressed as Von¹, and become a staff officer.

Going to War College was a rare experience after all. If my ranking was too high, things would become problematic after that, but I wouldn't be able to act freely if my position was too low. With this point in mind, if I could earn an outstanding evaluation and obtain the honourable title of a Knight of War College, it wouldn't be too bad, but that would still be dependent on my results and my relations with the trainers.

Considering the fact that I was suspected of lacking a drive and fighting spirit, this rank was adequate. I just need to adopt a more proactive attitude in the future. I had been down on my luck recently, so I have to watch out.

Nevertheless, let's leave it at this for today. Captain Uga paid for my lunch just now thanks to my gift of the gab. Dinner would be hosted by the General Staff Office, I wonder what the menu would be. It won't reach the standard of the navy, but I heard the quality of the dining hall in the General Staff Office wasn't too bad. I was looking forward to it.

¹ **Von**, A decoration placed inside the name of aristocrats. In modern times, new nobles (Quasi-aristocrats) would add the word von into their own name when introducing themselves. This was equivalent to the English 'Sir' and the French 'De'.

General Staff Office (Army) First Dining Hall

Just as when a batch of trainees from a certain War College was sharing tales of their exploits in one of the restaurants within the city, similar conversations was also happening inside the First Dining Hall of the General Staff Office.

However, the main difference was that the meals were restricted by formalities and tradition.

Long ago, the Imperial Army built an extravagant dining hall inside the General Staff Office. Not only did the soldiers complain that the dining hall was a waste, even the officers couldn't use it conveniently, so it wasn't evaluated well. However, a single sentence from the navy had turned all that around, which was 'Even the dining halls of the army are unnecessary'.

In response to the navy mocking them, the army countered by proposing to cut down the unnecessary facilities on warships.

Which was 'Just what the hell are those people who fight wars inside a hotel thinking'.

And so, the army united as one, and treated all criticism against the dining hall to be traitorous. After that, in order to make a show of the army utilizing the dining hall, conferences related to the army would often be hosted over a meal in the dining hall. When he received the notice for the lunch meeting, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen was just placing his bag onto his office desk in the Operation Department after finishing his inspection tour of the northern and western front. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen was already used to this.

However, the problem was the topic of the lunch meeting.

"I object. I strongly object to this."

The moment he opened the letter, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen couldn't help but open his eyes wide, he absolutely couldn't accept this. His brooding over this matter had even caused him to lose his focus during the morning work session. And thus, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen who barely touched any of the food before him, was the only one among the high level officers to oppose the plan.

“Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen, I respect your opinion, but you have to put aside your objective views.”

Yet unfortunately, his direct supervisor, Brigadier General Rudelsdorf who was serving as Deputy Chief of Operations did not support his view at all. After all, this was the proposal that would improve the strategic direction of the war that he had been waiting for. He probably wouldn't let it go easily. But regardless, in the eyes of Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen, this was simply too dangerous a case to let go.

“We absolutely can't let her command the Quick Reaction Wing. Going by her character, she won't stop advancing until everyone in unit are wiped out. This would be throwing the lives of the mages away!”

Lieutenant Degurechaff would be promoted to Captain the moment she graduates from War College. It made him afraid, but he could still resolve to this much. Lehrgen thought that he could assign her to the vacancies in one of the research labs or the training team and had let his guard down. He never imagined that the higher ups were planning to form an experimental unit under the command of Captain Degurechaff!

Good lord! This is absolutely a nightmare. She is too dangerous. That war theory was her strong point.

“You have expressed this several times, but the instructors in War College had evaluated her as someone who values the lives of her troops.”

There were some instructors in Officer Cadet School who supported Lehrgen's view that she was too blood thirsty.

However, the views of the instructors in War College were different. Even when pushed to the limit during her staff officer training tour, she would still cherish the lives of the soldiers and avoid wasting them. *This isn't something superficial*—— That was their conclusion. In the General Staff Office where everyone were graduates of the War College, this evaluation was something which held a lot of weight.

The report stated ‘Strong desire for combat. Despite that, she retained the common sense to avoid suffering losses.’ In short, they saw this as an excellent quality.

“Aren’t you bound by your prejudice too much?”

“... Didn’t you see her report from Officer Cadet School?”

Unwilling to give in, Lehrgen brought up the negative review that he had uncovered previously. However, as a staff officer who graduated from the War College, Lehrgen knew very well who his superiors would give more weight in regards to. The creature known as soldiers would respect the judgement from their own group more.

“Just think of it as her growth after being educated. War College says that she will be fine.”

The evaluation would probably be the opposite if she caused any trouble in War College. However, her great results and her achievement of being selected as a War College Knight had flawlessly covered for everything.

“Instead of being the result of education, her actions are closer to that of her true nature! We can’t give the Wing to her!”

At the very least, he had to raise his opposition. Even if this might hurt his career as a high ranking officer, he must not shy away from his obligation as a soldier. If they handed a Wing to her, the Wing would most likely be killed before even engaging the enemy. This was something he simply couldn’t accept as a soldier.

“Mainly because she is too young, and her rank is below the criteria!”

“It has been decided that Lieutenant Degurechaff will be promoted to Captain. Instead of leading a Squadron, she is a talent that should command a Wing.”

“The Empire can’t afford to let capable soldiers lay idle. You should know that.”

Yet the higher ups had already decided on the course of action. When he heard Brigadier General Rudelsdorf admonishing him, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen understood that. Resolving this took priority in order to improve their reaction time. There might be some lingering problems, but the big wigs would definitely turn a blind eye to it.

“If that is so, we should send her back to the Training Department, or work as a research personnel. She is still a child. Do you not understand just how terrifying the naivety of children can be?”

He tried coming up with alternate proposals. Traditionally, the General Staff Office welcomes debate. They believe that gathering viewpoints from more perspectives would reduce the flaws of their plans.

“Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen, I will listen to your views. But this matter has already been decided.”

“This is the decision of the General Staff Office. I believe you know what that means.”

On the other hand, anything decided through debate would leave no room for opposition. They promote absolute scrutiny in their discussion, but once the matter had been decided, they would request everyone to work together and execute it without delay. If someone couldn't do so, they would be expelled from the General Staff Office.

“... Ugh, pardon me.”

So it has been set in stone—— Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen wallowed despairingly. He never thought the epaulette of the staff officers would ever look so wicked, but he still suppressed his emotions. No, he would normally never go against central to such an extent. Despite all that, he was still very uneasy.

“Very well. We will proceed as planned and let Captain Degurechaff create a new Wing.”

“When the rostering is done, prepare the notification letter for her promotion to Major and her assignment as a Wing Commander.”

“That would be all. We will move on to the next topic.”

... Was this really fine?

“Seeing it once is better than hearing about it a hundred times.”

This was Tanya’s frank impression for the food on the plate that was served to her by the orderly.

Tanya knew this was a dish called Schlachtplatte. She didn’t mind the mixed platter of meat, and on top of that, it was braised, something almost impossible to do on the battlefield. Living in the trenches meant a diet with vitamin C was hard to sustain, so using a luxurious cooking method that would waste it was something that could only be found in the rear.

Considering the fact that people returning from the front lines would dine at this restaurant, including dishes that could only be found in the rear into the menu was a good idea. Another thing they took into consideration was that the cost of the meal was the same as of the ones in the frontlines, a careful way to show that the rear wasn’t splurging.

Everything was fine so far. So far.

The problem was that instead of being sour, it just tasted salty, and the pork was half cooked. If it were not for the potatoes, the platter would only be fit for the trash bin. This surprised her greatly.

Furthermore, the bread being served was K-brot¹. This seemed to be done in order to advertise the bread, but to be frank, the navy’s rye bread was probably more nutritious and delicious. If it was up to her, she would beg them not to forcefully mix flour with potatoes to make bread, but to make normal food with them separately.

If she went to the navy’s dining hall, she would definitely get something nicer with the same budget.

The reason for this was simple. The army would never leak this out, but the facilities of the dining hall used up too much of the funds, so they had to take some of budget from the kitchen to cover the shortfall, which was almost an open secret.

¹ **Army Ration Bread**, The new type of bread which was the pride of Germany. Also known as steel net, dried veggie and K-Brot. Kriegsbrot (which means K bread) was a member of the most unpalatable battle rations. The volume of the bread was increased by mixing potato into flour, making it a healthy and nutritious meal. Regrettably, the taste was terrible. The Empire has no shortage of potatoes, so plentiful amount of K bread were supplied to all units.

And unlike the navy, the army had a culture of not minding poor food, and that failed to stimulate the creativity of the chefs. Not just that, with the kitchen staff changing frequently, they didn't have the skills to keep up.

Even the K-brot was served because it was the cheapest and least popular. The food in the army dining hall of the General Staff Office couldn't even hold a candle to the mess hall of the junior officers, and it was pointless to compare it to the senior officer dining hall, which was the pride of the navy. The stubbornness of the Army in refusing to accept the accusation by the navy that this was a waste of budget was mind boggling. To be honest, it could compete with the United Kingdom in being the lowest standard of the culinary world. No, it might be worse than Haggis.

This wasn't a taste that would entice anyone to go over on their own.

"... How does it taste, Captain? This is the speciality of the General Staff Office."

That's right, on their own. Oppositely speaking, this was a meal that was especially ordered by the General Staff Office's Colonel Kodru, from the Personnel Department, and Brigadier General Zettois from the Logistics Bureau. So she had to eat. Or rather, she had no other choice but to eat.

"Yes, if I have to tell the truth, this is an excellent dish that reminds me of how I feel at the frontlines. I am very impressed."

"Hahahaha, quite the splendid answer, isn't that right, Sir Zettois?"

And that was why Tanya had to speak her mind while keeping her manners in response to Brigadier General Zettois' question. Even if she was expected to endure coarse food, this was just too much.

He probably liked her answer a lot. Colonel Kodru laughed heartily and muttered: "Let's rename the dining hall as 'Reminiscence of the Battlefield'..."

"Your attitude is admirable, Captain, but you don't need to hold back."

"No, I have eaten my fill. Please don't mind me."

Honestly speaking, they didn't seem to be enjoying their meal either.

“Really? You are still growing, it isn’t good to eat too little.”

“Yes Sir, but I have a tiny appetite. I will try to eat more.”

They had to use the dining hall in the General Staff Office because of the position they were in... And Brigadier General Zettois who was forced by the army to frequent this place had probably asked all new staff officers the same thing. Tanya felt that this was similar to how some of the professors in War College liked to play pranks on the students.

However, that was only during the meal.

After Colonel sent away the orderly who came to clear the plates, asking them to not come near after serving coffee, they started the meeting in earnest.

“Let’s get started on the main topic. Ah, it’s a bit late, but congratulations on your promotion, Captain Degurechaff.”

The moment she graduated from War College, she received the notice on her promotion to Captain. The one who approved of this was none other than Colonel Kogru himself. His well wishes felt really empty.

“Thank you for your kind words, Colonel.”

She wasn’t tall enough and barely reached the dining table by sitting on a high chair. Even if she straightened her back, she had to look up at the other party. Despite this, Tanya acted like a model officer and offered her thanks in a cheerful voice.

At the very least, in a huge organization like the military, that behaviour was very laudable.

And the Colonel from the Personnel Department was smiling kindly too. Even though he adopted this attitude to urge the other party to follow, etiquettes weren’t meaningless. At least for negotiations, this was a tool that might help identify the opponent’s weakness.

She spoke loudly, in contrast to the indifference held in her heart. She had already received her promotion notification.

The Colonel already knew this and didn't need to make a show of congratulating her. What they were going to talk about next would be the key points.

“Not just the promotion notification, we also need to decide which unit you will be assigned to.”

That's right. The career path of a War College graduate. The posting of the War College graduates wasn't decided by the director of training, but laid in the hands of the General Staff Office.

This small group of people with a strong sense of camaraderie held the authority for personnel resource matters. It was obvious that displeasing them would not end well. And the reverse was true too.

“If possible, I would like to hear your opinion as a reference.”

“My deepest gratitude.”

The so called reference that Colonel Kodru mentioned would be pretending to listen to what I have to say. Anyone who worked in personnel affairs would have experienced times where they ignored the personal opinions of the promotees when appointing office, which wasn't that rare.

No matter how friendly the people from the Personnel Department looked, I can't let down my guard. Or rather, I know they are the type who lived in the world of superficial words. That's why I have to respond with superficial words too.

“However, I am a soldier. If there is an order, I will humbly accept whatever unit I am posted to.”

A blatant lie. Saying that she would humbly accept whatever unit that was, would be better than startling the snake within the grass under most circumstances. And of course, she had to be careful to not pick the short straw.

“Very well. These are the documents for you.”

The Colonel seemed very pleased, he carefully took out a stack of staff requisition forms and handed them to me. They were all from front line units. And all were in urgent need of mages and officers. Although there were some units recuperating in

the rear too. It seemed that many units wanted me... One wrong move from me, and I would be thrown into the harshest place without any choice.

“Oh right, the General Staff Office also submitted one.”

The last paper he proffered was simply a request by the General Staff Office for me to be posted there.

“Considering the merits you achieved, the Personnel Department would not dictate your choice. So pick a unit you like.”

“There are too many to choose from, I don’t know which one I should select.”

In actual fact, I didn’t have a choice. The General Staff Office which controlled personnel selection just wanted me to know how many units wanted me.

However, the General Staff Office was already asking her to join, what kind of fool would refuse? It was impossible to reject.

“That’s true.”

The Colonel urged me after thinking carefully. This might just be an act, but he seemed to be sincerely advising a young girl who was troubled by her career path. He was an excellent actor to mold such an image of a character. But long before he assisted with my poor acting, it was obvious that this was a third rate screenplay where the ending was clear as day.

“No matter what era it is, there are no easy jobs.”

“That’s right.”

I kept my back straight as I answered. It seemed that the other party was busy, and didn’t have time to accommodate my bad acting skills.

“I don’t know where the General Staff Office would post you, but good luck.”

“I am grateful, Colonel.”

Wishing me luck was a personal expression. In short, it was a message that showed his personal goodwill. He seemed to have grasped something and was evaluating me highly.

Which meant that it was a lie he didn't know where I would be posted. I should assume he already knew. *What do you know?* Tanya wanted to ask, and unconsciously tilted her head slightly like a child.

In response to her quizzing gaze, the Colonel nodded sagely and stood up.

"It's regretful that we couldn't enjoy dessert together, but I need to make a move first."

"Thank you for your hard work, Colonel Kodru. See you later."

After speaking his piece, Colonel Kodru left the dining hall swiftly. With his eyes on the Colonel's departing figure, Brigadier General Zettois called for an adjutant standing by at the side, and started sorting through documents, preparing for the main reason why Tanya was summoned.

"Since it's you, let us go straight to the work content. You will be assigned to a unit under the General Staff Office. Although I am not your direct supervisor, you can assume that you are working right under me."

"Yes Sir. Please take care of me from now on too."

He explained formally. But even Brigadier General Zettois who have served in the army for many years never imagined that he would have a 11 years old child working as his subordinate.

Even the subject herself seemed fine with this, which made Zettois wonder if she had had a hard time adapting to life in the War College. But since she was competent enough to be selected as a knight and a veteran of war, age was just a small issue.

From our experience, something inside the head of this petite girl told us how foolish it was to judge the situation visually. We should feel that something was wrong about this situation. It was bizarre for her to display such extraordinary talent at such a young age.

Should we compliment the original concept raised by hers, or admonish her for being crazy?

And was she useful as an officer? That was the only thing Brigadier General Zettois and the General Staff Office was interested in. If she could be used, then nothing else matters.

“Very good.”

In actual fact, she didn’t seem nervous about commanding a Wing despite not having led a Squadron before. From the way she was acting, Tanya probably knew that she would become a commander of a Wing immediately.

I heard from the Librarians from War College that she had studied operations on the scale of a Wing before. If she wasn’t confident, she would not have put in the effort to prepare to such a degree. This meant that the Captain Degurechaff in front of her was already a Wing commander before she was appointed to do so.

“Captain. The General Staff Office intends to have you command a Wing immediately.”

To tell the truth, it couldn’t be helped that she was so anxious. Commanding a Mage Wing would grant her the discretion to make decision and control a sizeable combat force, a unit scale that enjoys a particular amount of liberty. She seemed to think she was suitable for fighting in the front lines, which most of the instructors had pointed out. According to them, she ‘values the lives of the soldiers, and approaches battles eagerly and decisively’.

A motivated field commander who is also an excellent Mage Officer. She would be fine even if I order her to lead her unit to the frontlines right now.

“Yes, it is my honour.”

For Zettois, he hoped that as one of the few Mage Officer who studied in War College, she could take on a broader role. In a way, he felt this was a good chance.

“Very well. But you will be commanding a newly created Mage Wing.”

“A new unit?”

“This is the norm of the organization. Give it up, there will be many problems coming up.”

Forming a unit, training them, setting up a management system. Without the support of experienced veterans, these would be difficult to carry out. People could create a organization, but an organization couldn't create people.

And so, if she could create the unit successfully, she would be acknowledged as a valuable asset. That was why she was forcibly given command of a Wing through the achievement of forming a new Wing.

“Tomorrow, you will receive your assignment as a Rostering Officer.”

Jobs for experts should be left to the professionals, Zettois made use of all the policies he could. It couldn't be helped, this was necessary in order to hand a Mage Wing over to a Lieutenant who had never commanded a Squadron before.

For example, the post of rostering officer was originally in charge of rostering mercenaries into the standing army, a relic post from the middle ages. It didn't require the experience of being a Squadron Captain, and could be held by any officer. It was used in order to make the management of the mercenaries uniform. The system was used about 200 years ago, but it wasn't abolished and was still in effect.

Since it was effective on paper, no one could raise any objections. In the end, it might be impossible to protest since people might not know what a rostering officer was.

“Rostering Officer? That seems to be a rather archaic post?”

But she was very competent. Degurechaff knew that a Rostering Officer was an ancient post. She probably would know very soon that this was a means to game the system and forcibly promote her.

She is really reliable. If she were a man, I would not hesitate marrying my granddaughter to him. But she was too reliable, it made me forget that the soldier before me is just a little girl.

“It would be difficult to hand a Wing over to a Captain. That’s why we are forcibly promoting you to Major through the achievement of creating a Wing.”

Maybe he shouldn’t have said it, but when Zettois looked at her, he couldn’t help thinking things would go smoother if he accepted her as a comrade. This was creating a new Wing from scratch. There were a mountain of things to do. That was why it would be better if he had told her that she didn’t need to be wary of the Logistics Department.

“... Can I assume that I am a de facto Wing Commander?”

“Do your best. That would secure your place as a Major and Wing Commander.”

Looks like she didn’t forget that she said she wanted a Wing. A mere Lieutenant asking a Brigadier General for that. She must possess extraordinary resolve and confidence to do that. And her capability was the real thing.

A talent who possesses the ability of a mage and the gift of leadership. I am prepared for the objections by other departments from forcefully promoting her.

“Might I assume that I would be hated by people around me, and act with that in mind?”

Most importantly of all was her cautious attitude as she feigned ignorance to confirm the situation with me. Instead of thinking that she would earn the ire of the people around her, it would be more accurate to say that it was already happening. Even if the words of her becoming a Wing Commander after a double promotion didn’t spread, she would still be very prominent with the speed of her rising through the ranks. But she was mentioning it now in order to confirm the situation and then ask for assistance.

“You are speaking as if you just noticed. Say it then, what do you want?”

“When creating the unit, can I presume that I would be completely in charge?”

“That’s right. I will do my best to assign the personnel and equipment to you.”

In response to her question, my answer was very clear. She was free to do with it as she wishes. If needed, I will give her the full support of the Logistics

Department. And just like what I requested Colonel Kodru of Personnel Affairs to express, the Personnel Department would give her leeway to a certain extent.

That was the agreement from the start. The personnel and equipment of the Wing would be arranged for her as much as possible.

“Just keep the number below forty eight, you can roster it however you want.”

And as compensation for making her create a Wing from scratch, I showed her some consideration. The most important being the size of the Wing. I secured the budget for an overstrength Wing. The reason I gave on paper was that this was an exception for an experimental unit.

“Forty eight, an overstrength Wing? Thank you General.”

“It is only natural for the quick reaction unit to be on the scale of an overstrength Wing. As this is a new unit, I prepared more budget for it.”

It wouldn't do if the quick reaction unit was too weak. After he muttered that, the Operations Department who would be deploying the unit on the ground expressed their support. Zettois also knew that Rudelsdorf's support from the back probably played a big part too.

However, Brigadier General Rudelsdorf's decision was largely influenced by the real gains. Instead of spreading their forces out, a Wing they could keep at hand was more valuable. Going by common sense, anyone would agree with this sentiment.

“But there is a condition, you can only pick personnel that are not in the western nor northern front. This is the only point that is non-negotiable.”

The only condition was where the personnel would come from. They couldn't draw the elites from the forces at the front lines. It was also the intent of the front line armies and the operations department to form the core of the unit from personnel who had yet to experience war.

In this way, it was a good chance for each of the armies to share their experience. For the various armies, as long as they manage to perform better than their counterparts, compared to having to restructure their pipeline, it couldn't be any better.

This unit would definitely become a pillar of the Imperial Military both physically and symbolically.

“The Wing would follow your profession, an Aerial Mage Wing.”

That was a given. The order for the formation of the Aerial Mage Wing was already issued, and the rest would be just a matter of time. Captain Degurechaff seemed to know that and didn’t say a word. That’s fine, cutting the pointless chatter was more efficient.

“Please tell me about the chain of command.”

She was someone who was forthright with her questions. It would be easy if Zettois could give the answer ‘quick reaction force headquarters’, but all he could do was smile wryly.

Fine, the commander would need to consider who she was working under. The fact that she asked this was enough to earn passing grades. After all, she wasn’t looking for trouble, and was just raising a question.

“From the perspective of the Quick Reaction unit, you are working directly under the General Staff Office. The ID prepared for your unit is V600. Do you have any requests?”

“I don’t have anything special to request. Please proceed as usual.”

There wasn’t any hesitation in her answer. Which meant that she wasn’t interested in names and fame. But she recognized the need for the unit identification for administrative processes.

“It would be 601 then. Basically, you don’t have a supervising officer. Rejoice, you will be working for the General Staff Office directly.”

“... This is the spring of my life.”

“Absolutely right, how envious.”

There was a saying that the Wing commanders had it the easiest. Getting to stand on the frontlines as the commanding officer, and given a certain level of command

autonomy. In short, they would be able to command the battle while getting into the thick of the fight. For exemplary soldiers, this was an easy position to be in.

Even more so for the Wing commander working directly under the General Staff Office who was free from annoying regulations.

“What about the deadline to create the unit?”

“As soon as possible, there isn’t any fixed deadline.”

“Understood, I will work hard in my selection.”

The base should be far away from the busy north and west borders, and the south and east which were prone to political interference, and set between them. Even though the administrative matters were handled by his subordinates, he could still deduce enough to inform her some things.

“Your base would probably be in the southeast.”

“Understood.”

The complete opposite direction of the main battlegrounds. Which means she would have ample time to train her unit. Tanya smiled as if implying she understood that. Seeing Degurechaff smile reminded Zettois of some bad rumours. She might be overly strict in her selection of subordinates.

“Captain, a piece of advice. There are people who criticized you for being too picky on selecting your men.”

This meant her talent and ability to nurture subordinates were being questioned, and would affect her evaluation files adversely. In the army, one couldn’t choose their superiors or subordinates. Simply put, you could only think of a way to complete your mission with what you are given.

If you couldn’t do that, no matter how capable your individual abilities were, you would be a failure as an officer and soldier. At most, you would be a lone wolf ostracized in the organization. After all, a group could win by using overwhelming numbers.

“I am not questioning your ability, but this isn’t a good reputation. Do take note of this.”

“Thank you for your concern, General.”

She had the composure to handle this criticism calmly. How reliable. She had probably laid out a basic recruitment plan already.

“It’s nothing, this is an achievement you earned by your own powers. Take pride in it.”

“Pride goeth before a fall, I prefer a humble life.”

“Excellent. Seems like there would be no problems.”

Most importantly, this person wasn’t arrogant about making it big and being granted special privileges. Keeping true to oneself, not overindulging in benefits, and completing her obligations perfectly. An officer that was rare these days. No, this was the demeanour of a noble. Being a noble wasn’t something hereditary, but an issue of how they act. The title of von wasn’t everything. After all, having a noble attitude had nothing to do with bloodlines.

“Your assignment orders will be given tomorrow. Don’t leave your dorm today.”

“... How efficient.”

She sounded surprised. Makes sense, if her assignment she received yesterday was changed today, it would only be normal for her to complain.

“Think of this as a small apology on my side. Don’t worry about it.”

“You are too kind, thank you General.”

“I have high expectations of you, Captain. Best of luck.”

I entrusted the experimental unit to her. It was a heavy responsibility, and I was sincerely expecting a lot from her. Hopefully, this experiment would bear fruit.

‘V600.’

This was a unit ID that didn’t exist on the records. After information related to the units was declassified after the war, aside from some that had been designated top secret, all the unit IDs were made public. But the V600 series was nowhere to be found.

The ID for the imperial army started from V000 for the units in central, and including all the regional armies, it only reached V400 plus. There were exceptions such as the unit under the research laboratory in central, but from the declassified data, they were either V000s or V500s.

Some experts deduced that in order to maintain a high level of secrecy, an exception was made for very sensitive experimental unit to be given ID in the V600s. The intense technological competition during the war advanced sciences by leaps and bounds. In order to finish at the top of the technological race, keeping things top secret was unavoidable. Did they set up a unit with another set of ID in order to keep the information classified?

This theory was very likely. We hurriedly made a list of related personnel from those retired from active service. At the same time, our team also attempted delving into the information on the Imperial Army science department. The results that surfaced pointed to an engineer who once worked under the central research laboratory.

We then gained the opportunity to interview this retired engineering officer who worked in the central research laboratory. His name is Adelaide von Schugel, former chief engineer. He was one of the leading developers that created the famed masterpiece, Elinium Type 97 ‘Mobile Assault’ Operation Orb during the war.

The devoted Mr Schugel would attend mass every sunday morning. Thanks to the pastor of the church he visited every week helping to introduce us, we managed to secure this meeting. Even though we would be under strict surveillance, luckily, the other party was willing to grant us an interview.

Mr Schugel was just like how he was described, a very rational person. “I am happy to receive guests who came from afar during the day we pray to God.”

“This must be God’s will“ he muttered, and sincerely welcomed us who came without invitation on this day of rest.

To be honest, we already braced ourselves for an Imperial Engineer like him to be eccentric, but the actual result deflated us a little. We then confessed to the gentle Mr Schugel that we doubted his character before this, and asked him to overlook our narrow mindedness.

“This meant you already know your mistake. Just follow your heart, you will be fine.”

After Mr Schugel accepted our apology with a smile, we asked him about experimental unit V600. However, the moment we asked about V600 Mr Schugel who was about to answer was stopped by the Military Police who was keeping watch. There must be something behind this. We were sure of this.

However, after Mr Schugel glanced at the Military Police, with a wry smile, he said something unexpected.

“The unit V600 never existed. But gentlemen, go search the records. Learning about history is important for journalists too.”

Although we were confused by the reply that had sternered together with a smile which hinted his helplessness, we still made our decision. V600 wasn’t a unit name, but something else, and continued our investigation with this lead. The key that Mr Schugel had provided us was to study history.

The unit ID that didn’t seem to exist. No, it really didn’t exist. Until a military expert enlightened us, we hugged our heads and troubled ourselves over it bitterly for almost an entire month.

However, another expert who was introduced to us by our colleague in international news saw our mistake in one glance.

‘VXXX is actually a rostering ID.’

According to the Imperial Military regulations, units were rostered by the Logistics Department, and utilized by the Operations Department. The rostering department being different from the utilization department was the key. Normally, the utilization unit would simply use the rostering ID.

For example, if the Logistics Department rostered a V101 unit to reinforce the central army, the Operations Department would utilize them as the 101st detachment force. But if the parent unit was not decided, they would assign an ID normally not used to avoid misunderstanding. And so, even though the rostered unit V600 might exist, the 600th combat unit might not.

Mixing up the two resulted in us creating the phantom 600th unit that didn't exist. Sigh, how embarrassing. We thought we uncovered the truth, but ended up in such a state.

And so we decided to search for materials in a bar on a whim, and wrote a piece on the journalistic team spending the entire day at the bar. (Unfortunately, the higher ups didn't acknowledge the expenses we incurred at the bar.)

I see, the brilliant Mr Schugel must have thought we were chasing something amazing, but his biggest mistake was assuming that we were smart enough to understand his advice.

Well, at the least our investigation can continue to progress. That's what we thought as we wracked our pained heads as we searched through the rostering records from the Imperial Logistics Department. Afterwards, we were able to easily locate what we were searching for.

After all, there was only one folder with the ID 600. It was just laying there, as if it was waiting for someone to find it. However, the inside was empty. All that was left was just a simple memo.

Notice from the Imperial General Staff Office:

We will always guide him, never abandon him, forever bounded to walk an unyielding path, onto the battlefield. All for the sake of victory. The mages we seek will head to the arduous battlefield, draw a pittance of a wage, live a gloomy life pelted by hails of bullets, shouldering unbearable risk with no guarantee of survival. Upon your return, fame and glory awaits.

General Staff Office 601st Rostering Committee

Speaking of which, what unit ID was the 601st rostered unit given? Unfortunately, this slip was the only thing we had. But for the Imperial Army that hated rhetoric phrasing, the emotions behind this note were abnormal.

It would leave an impression on anyone who saw it. After making that deduction, we started investigating the Imperial mages who served during that time. We hit the jackpot with the first person we interviewed. The answer was rather regrettable.

“Ah, that is really famous. It was about forming a political propaganda unit? The guys who went to sign up with sincere intentions all complained about it when they came back.”

“Political propaganda unit?”

“That’s right, I heard it was a unit to advertise ‘the justice and nobility of the Empire’.”

“Erm, you say that it was political propaganda, but we don’t have such information on our hands.”

“That is only natural. Using an Aerial Mage Wing for political propaganda will definitely invite censure.”

“T-That means?”

“I heard they spread the rumours about rostering a new unit in response to the strong protest from the Operations Department and front line units. This should be a rather famous incident.”

Could it be — The interview team carried that thought with them as they interviewed several former Imperial Mages. They were half hoping they would refute it; and the half hoping in resignation that they would answer ‘yes, I know about that incident’.

Maybe it was fate, or perhaps it was a stroke of luck, the situation was different than expected. We obtained reliable testimonies from several mages.

“Yes, I know about that incident. It was the result of the quick reaction headquarter’s failure in coming to a compromise in realizing their concept.”

“What about the political propaganda unit?”

“Ah, those are just rumours. I heard the quick reaction unit was given the unit ID V600.”

“Quick reaction unit?”

“Yes, the higher ups wanted a unit that was more convenient for precision operation than the continental army. But it seemed to be a failure.”

The above was from a former soldier from the central army.

“It seems that for the sake of convenience, they called the combined unit for the western and eastern units as V600.”

“... Have you heard about the quick reaction unit or the political propaganda unit?”

“Yes, that’s misinformation. Happens all the time in war.”

“What kind of unit was V600?”

“Simply put, it was the reorganization of the western and eastern units that suffered losses in the early stages of the war.”

“Reorganization?”

“That’s right, I heard they weren’t disbanded, but reorganized for easy deployment.”

“What about the other rumours?”

“I heard it was misinformation spread by spies. It seemed to be used to intimidate the enemy with the news of us reorganizing an elite force.”

The above was from a former soldier serving in the northern army.

Aside from that, we heard all sorts of rumours that bordered on being ridiculous at first glance. This was like the collection of wartime rumours, making us hold our

belly in laughter while being confused at the same time. The deeper we digged, the more rumours surfaced in unrelated matters. Even though there might be more than one truth, there should be a limit to this. We were completely lost in the fog.

What exactly was the truth? We need to consider this question. Despite hearing all sorts of rumours, something still didn't feel right. After summing up the numbers, all the rumours had similar contradictory elements. Which meant there was definitely one truth which became exaggerated because of rumours. If that was so, we were nowhere near the truth at all.

Just like the war. People often talk about the war, telling the world what a tragedy war was. But the truth behind this war still wasn't clear.

The chaos of 'V600' and '11th Goddess'.

Wasn't that the very nature of that war.?

(Author: Andrew, WTN field reporter)

General Staff Office Rostering Branch

This was an office with the sign saying 'General Staff Office Logistic Department 601st Rostering Committee'. It was situated in a corner within the General Staff Office, an office used to raise new units. And the owner of this office, Tanya Degurechaff was holding her head in agony before this unbelievable development.

The reason was the mountain of application forms on the desk before Tanya who was sitting in her custom chair. If she was recruiting fresh graduates, having so many applications would be understandable. If a high paying unit like the General Staff Office had set up a new unit and was recruiting fresh graduates, Tanya herself would apply.

But that's not what the recruitment was about. Even though she felt her sensibility differed from that of others sometimes, this was completely out of her expectation. She wondered if she got something wrong, and even gotten a hold of the recruitment briefs that were sent to all the regional army, went through it word by word and didn't find any mistake.

“We will always guide him, never abandon him, forever bounded to walk an unyielding path, onto the battlefield. All for the sake of victory. The mages we seek will head to the arduous battlefield, draw a pittance of a wage, live a gloomy life pelted by hails of bullets, shouldering unbearable risk with no guarantee of survival. Upon your return, fame and glory awaits.”

Will be deployed to the frontlines often, and would be the last one to leave in a retreat; even if it was an unreasonable order, they would need to break open the frontlines. Not permitted to surrender nor retreat, the warning that they would always be on the battlefield; The ending lines even confessed that the battlefield was a harsh place, and the remuneration would be poor. Logically speaking, she fulfilled her obligation to explain. Aside from this, she specifically highlighted the horrible scenes of the rain of bullets, the need to be ever vigilant, and that you would die from just one careless mistake. Even if you survive, you will receive medals, but no special rewards.

No matter how you look at it, this was a recruitment brief on the level of ‘one way ticket to hell and travel guide, thank you for reading’. Rationally speaking, no one would want to apply after reading this messed up recruitment brief. Tanya believed this strongly.

However, she herself would definitely not apply. If normal soldiers wouldn’t apply either, then she could use the lack of volunteers as an excuse to stall for time. She even admired the guts of the Logistics Department for letting her reckless recruitment brief pass through.

It was impossible for mages who were elites and receivers of preferential treatment to respond to such a recruitment criteria. This was like placing a recruitment ad on Wall Street or the City of London that says ‘Unpaid overtime, no employment insurance, frequent work on day off and no guarantee of medical assistance. When business deal is successful, you will be rewarded with the feeling of satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment (chances of success are bleak).’ No one would think that any economist or professional trader will apply for the job.

When she proposed such a harsh recruitment criteria, she already foresaw that just gathering volunteers would waste three months. But in reality? The results were the mountain of documents, all of them were applications from the regional armies.

It has only been one week since recruitment started.

“... Why is this happening?”

She held her head in agony at the desk by herself, and sighed after groaning out her question. Tanya thought there wouldn't be many volunteers, so she only borrowed some people from the Logistics Department when setting up the office, and thought she could settle the other matters by herself. She was regretting her naive decision from the bottom of her heart.

It was problematic that her plans had been derailed, but before that, the amount of documents wasn't something she could handle by herself. There was a limit to how highly she thought of her administrative abilities. Even if she wanted to solve the problem of lacking in manpower, it wasn't easy to find help.

Basically, this was a strategical failure. It would be hard to improve the current situation with street smart tactics. Even though she wondered where the common sense of the people had gone, she had to admit that there was a huge mistake in the preconception of the plan. That's right, the Rostering Officer from the General Staff Office Rostering Branch — Captain Tanya Degurechaff tasted defeat before the harsh face of reality.

In the end, the fact that the General Staff Office decided to set up an experimental quick reaction mage wing, and entrusted this huge plan to her was beyond her expectation. From Tanya's perspective, she expressed her capability and grasp of the situation when she spoke to Brigadier General Zettois, in order to subtly leave a good impression on him. Yet before she knew it, the big shot entrusted a wing to her, and gave her free rein to set it up.

Tanya felt the urge to scream 'this is insane'. However current the situation gave her no choice but to mutter empty phrases like the such of “As a soldier, shouldering this responsibility brings me utmost joy”, as she felt baffled in her heart.

The military bureaucracy was willing to back her, what an incredibly generous attitude. This was as incredible as watching something impossible unfold before one's eyes. It was so strange that she felt the urge to blow someone's head off with a rifle to see if this was really reality.

After all, even though this was just for the rostering of the unit, she had the right to ignore the top down hierarchy of the army in name. She had a lot of autonomy. The scale of the rostered unit was an overstrength wing. Even the deadline was up to her.

As she held her head and reflected painfully, her eyes happened to catch a glimpse of the telephone on her desk, and remembered the adjutant that had completely slipped through her mind because she was simply too busy. *That's right, I should have an adjutant.* Finally remembering this, the idea that she could use her adjutant like a secretary flashed across her mind, and she picked up the phone.

“Adjutant, adjutant!”

It has been a week since she set up an office in this corner of General Staff Office. Tanya who finally remembered the existence of her Adjutant picked up the phone and called for her adjutant. What was on Tanya's mind right now was to gather administrative staff to digest this mountain of documents. If possible, Tanya would want a dozen of meticulous Military Police officers who would not miss any details to help, and she wanted them right now.

“Yes Captain, how may I assist?”

Hmm? It seems to be the voice of a young woman, and a familiar one at that?

She was bothered, but for Tanya who was placing priority on gathering manpower, all that was on her mind was the piles of documents on her desk. She merely grunted when queried on permission to enter, not lifting her face from the piles of documents. But this was still the first time she was meeting someone who was assigned under her. *I should greet her...* With that thought, she raised her head, and her face was stunned like a pigeon who got shot after seeing that familiar face.

“It has been a long time, Captain Tanya Degurechaff. Victoria Ivanovna Serbiakof, reporting for duty.”

The person before her who came with a lively salute was the first subordinate Tanya had. Tanya returned her salute and peeked at the epaulette on her shoulders, a Second Lieutenant. From the looks of things, she completed her crash course in OCS, and was commissioned. Tanya lowered her arm after thinking this far.

“It’s been quite a while, Lieutenant Serbiakof. Ah, although it might be a bit late, but congratulations on your promotion.”

“Thank you Captain.”

Meeting an unexpected person in an unexpected place surprised her.

“So you are my adjutant?”

“That’s right.”

I see, the higher ups are really considerate. Letting someone of the same sex serve as her adjutant was unexpectedly thoughtful. Even if Tanya wasn’t planning for her subordinates to handle her personal matters, having a female adjutant would be more convenient — It was natural for the higher ups to have such strange worries.

And she only hoped that the adjutant wasn’t incompetent, but to think it would actually be her. This was a happy miscalculation for Tanya. If her adjutant was a capable and reliable subordinate, work would be much smoother. Fortunately, Visha was competent, so she could order her about as a secretary and adjutant.

“Well then, sorry to trouble you Lieutenant, can you help me borrow some men from the headquarters of the Military Police?”

To be honest, she wanted a line that could call the Military Police office directly. But for some reasons, her office’s phone couldn’t call an outside line from the Army General Staff Office. This was probably for secrecy, so she had to endure it. *Might as well, putting in a full telephone is bothersome anyway.*

“Understood. Captain, how many people should I get from the Military Police headquarters?”

“Anyone free would be fine. Remember to tell them I would like twelve if possible.”

“Understood, I will head there right away.”

Seeing her working so reliably made Tanya smile. The large amount of work was annoying, but a dependable subordinate would lighten the workload on her. However, that would have to wait until the manpower arrives. No matter what,

what she needed now was to deal with the problem of the overwhelming applicants.

Taking a deep breath to muster her motivation, she reviewed the list of applications and found those from the western and northern army mixed in... Tanya remembered that the applicants couldn't be chosen from the regional armies at the very front lines. *Never mind, this is probably an administrative error, they need to check through such a huge number of applicants after all.* When she thought about that, Tanya had a flash of brilliance to solve this problem, which was to re-evaluate the eligibility criteria.

By using administrative means, she would declare all the documents void and redo the recruitment.

“Alright, I should hurry and report to the Brigadier General.”

Tanya was planning to stall for more time by complaining that there were too many administrative mistakes. But the instant she stood up, she felt the need to review her shallow idea.

Wait wait wait, am I thinking about this too simply?

She hoped in the beginning that there would be less applicants than required. The need to get the unit combat ready as soon as possible while taking into account the need to keep quality high meant it should be easy to stall for time. Yet the reality was that the applications were overwhelming, and the reality became that it had become a situation that could easily mislead others into thinking that she was just wasting time in front of the mountain of documents, which was dangerous.

Or rather, it would be wiser in this current situation to set up the unit fast and drag the training time as long as possible to forge sturdy human shields. Tanya decided to change her mindset. It would be better to put aside more time to train her subordinates that would make good shields. She would pretend she didn't see the western and northern documents. *This is the result of thorough screening, consider yourself lucky this time. These volunteers are probably forced to volunteer anyway.* Since this unit would despatch them to the frontlines they wouldn't want to go to, they must be hoping that their application would be rejected. Which meant, it would be better to fail them. This would definitely help me accumulate karma.

In that case, it would be better to make use of the large numbers of applicants, raise the bar of entry to create the best unit ever. That would ensure the quality, and waste time on rostering the unit. If things went well, she would be able to spend a lot of time on personnel selection; Even in the worst scenario, her subordinates that made it through the selection would definitely make great shields, there were no downsides. Not just that, there were plenty of upsides to this.

Oh right. Since things had come to be like this, it would be best to focus on damage control. Likewise, one should always avoid making stupid decision process like that for what happened to the Concorde Aircraft.

Damage control meant minimizing the losses as much as possible. In other words, she needed to avoid beating the grass and startling the snake. If she could do that, there would be no problem. *I will make my selection so stringently that not just demons, even demon gods would run at the sight of me.*

When humans were forced into a corner, that was the most they could do.

Imperial Military General Staff Office, Subsidiary Building Conference Room Seven

“First Lieutenant Aishya Schubertz reporting in.”

“First Lieutenant Krejn Barhein, here to report too.”

The two young First Lieutenants had rushed to the capital in response to a summon. When they reached the 601st Rostering Committee base in the suburbs, the time was exactly 11am. In order to form the most elite mage unit, they signed up after their superiors asked for volunteers. The two who applied out of a sense of duty and ambition stated their rank and name in high spirits.

“Thank you for coming. I am the 601st Rostering Committee Chairman Colonel Gregorio von Turner from the General Staff Office.”

Colonel Gregorio received the applicants. From the other side of the desk, he stared at them as if he was trying to see through the two of them. The pressure from a veteran made the two soldiers straighten their backs.

After seeing the two applicants stood up straight, the colonel nodded as if he understood something.

“You must have received the notice for today’s schedule, but there has been some last minute changes.”

Even in OCS, changes to the schedule or objectives were something that happens frequently.

This must be a test of their ability to adapt. Judging this to be the case, the two of them focused their attention on the colonel’s every word.

“The schedule to report at 1400 hours to the seventh training grounds is cancelled. Both of you are to report to the 6th Aerial Combat Command immediately.”

Immediately — The key word was probably ‘immediately’. This was definitely a test of how well they could handle emergency orders.

“... Aside from that, I believe I don’t need to say this, but you have to keep the selection process confidential.”

This was followed by the obligation to keep the selection process secret. As expected. The two of them immediately thought about the confidentiality clause, and adjusted their original plan. In principle, flying was prohibited in the city. Normal means of transport should suffice, but they should stick with military vehicles. And if possible using the vehicles provided by the Military Police would be ideal.

“If your capability to maintain confidentiality should come under question, you will be sent back to your unit for disciplinary actions. Take note of that.”

“Yes Sir.”

After hearing the words of caution that goes without saying, the two of them left the room quickly and began their discussion.

“Sixth Aerial Combat Command? Sorry, do you know where that is?”

“Don’t worry, I remember it is a unit situated in Augsburg Airbase.”

This was a foreign Air Command for First Lieutenant Baruhein. Fortunately, First Lieutenant Schubertz knew it well. It was situated within Augsburg Airbase, located in the suburbs of the capital. She remembered it was a transport unit that could handle large scale transport operations. As they were applying to join an elite unit, they must have placed heavy emphasis on cooperation with the air force. Considering the need to maintain secrecy, it made sense for it to be in a base in the suburbs.

“So it’s in the suburbs? Oh no. Where can we get a military vehicle?”

It was easy for the two young Lieutenants to understand the reasons behind this. But the problem was in getting a military vehicle. Regrettably, the two of them were currently a part of the eastern army, and didn’t have the authority to give orders to the men here, and had limited options for transport. On top of that, with the need for secrecy, they would probably be sent back to their unit right away if they took a taxi to the base.

“.....Military Police team seconded to the General Staff Office should have vehicles. Maybe we can borrow a car from them.”

As First Lieutenant Schubertz was feeling troubled, the figure of the Military Police saluting her gave her an idea. She walked forward briskly, and confirmed that the Military Policeman before them was a Sergeant seconded to the General Staff Office. If it was him, there should be a car they could borrow. And since they were working under the General Staff Office, there wouldn’t be any problems with maintaining secrecy.

“Sergeant, can we borrow a car from you?”

“Of course Lieutenant. That won’t be a problem.”

He obliged immediately. Pleased with his efficiency, the two officers expressed their thanks. After saluting respectfully and sending off the two Lieutenants, the Sergeant and his men from the Military Police all hung their heads and sighed the instant the car was out of sight.

Even though it was their duty to despatch the people who had been tricked to that base where they would be sent back to their unit, the numbers were too many.

“...Is that the 14th group?”

After confirming verbally, he once again realized how many people were tricked.

“How many groups are left today? I heard there are five more.”

Just today, they had received the same request 14 times. Even patrolling intentionally on the route where the applicants would see them was the direction from the top. It might be a coincidence if it's just a couple of groups, but when the numbers reached to such an extent, the intentions of the examiner was clear for all to see.

“This is bad, I thought there would be at least four groups passing.”

To think that they would be conned so easily to return to their unit without noticing the truth. The two Lieutenants would definitely board the transport plane in Augsburg heading towards the east, and get sent back to their unit.

“So the guys from team three got it right?”

Team three betted on all the applicants wiping out. Team one betted on four successes. By the way, Team two betted on half the applicants getting through, and was already eliminated. *Please, come on, pass the test.*

When he thought about the wine he had bet, Military Police Sergeant desperately prayed for these applicants to make the cut. He wasn't very devout, but all he could do was pray to God now. After all, there were no devotees more sincere than a gambler.

Two days later, the Imperial Military General Staff Office, Subsidiary Building Conference Room Seven

“What do you mean V601 is just a political propaganda!?”

The young Second Lieutenant couldn't accept it as the fact as he protest earnestly. His clenched fists were inches away from banging the desk. He rushed here because he wanted to help the western army that was in a tough fight. However... The mission given to the eastern army was just political propaganda?

Don't joke with me, the Second Lieutenant expressed his anger with his entire body.

“Calm down, Lieutenant. I don't want to tell you that either.”

In contrast, the Major lowered his head apologetically. That's right, the Major was begging the Second Lieutenant for forgiveness. He was baffled by this turn of events. Even though the Major couldn't express it well in words, he was still showing his sincerity to the Second Lieutenant with his action.

After seeing his attitude, even the enraged Second Lieutenant understood that it was useless to be angry at the Major who was in front of him.

“... You want me to just walk away quietly?”

“I am sorry. I am happy that you are full of drive. If there is another chance, do apply for it again.”

The Major's tone sounded sympathetic. It was probably the apologetic tone that made the Second Lieutenant relax his clenched fist. After saluting perfectly, he left the room.

“... I will take my leave.”

The moment the Second Lieutenant closed the door, the figure of the Major watching him flickered and faded. At the same time, the seats concealed by Optical Decoy were revealed. The young Second Lieutenant was impassioned, but he didn't realize that he had been observed all this while. That was the reason why the people observing him all sighed in disappointment. And those were really deep sighs.

“... It is about time we did a focus study on Optical Decoy countermeasures.”

In a corner that was just a wall just now, several officers appeared out of thin air, and one of them spat these words out as if he had eaten a pound of bitter gourd. After all, they had grown tired of watching such monotonous third rate drama for the umpteenth time.

It was really depressing to see those fools who didn't realize they had been conned spewing such retarded words. It was only natural for them to feel annoyed.

And the gimmick behind this was really simple. Which was the hologram created to deceive others by using Optical Decoy. First, a hologram of a person was projected before the desk at the corner of the room, and using Optical decoy to disguise the sense of incongruity in the room. That was mainly changing the interior decor to hide the incongruity of the desk being placed near a corner.

By using these changes, the room was disguised so that the desk was placed closer to the middle of the wall. Which means the room was made to look narrower. The high ranking officers were standing in the excess space as they observed bitterly. The Second Lieutenant who was full of drive but didn't achieve anything for his effort was putting on a show by himself in front of the inspectors.

The conclusion was that as a mage, before discussing common sense, he even lacked cognitive abilities. By proving his lack of cognitive ability, he splendidly advertised the fact that the eastern army was deficient in combat experience. It would be fine if it was the enemy, but there were no staff officers who would be happy that their unit's incompetence was proven.

“It is just as I said. It is only natural to criticize them for having a narrow field of vision.”

Captain Degurechaff shrugged. Seeing her annoyed expression, the group who came from the eastern army a few days ago to protest all turned pale.

During the selection process for the elite unit, almost all the applicants from the eastern army failed, which started a storm of anger.

They received the merciless appraisal of being ‘incompetent, lazy, arrogant, brainless, retarded, lacking focus, unobservant and the worst kind of wage thief’. And the conclusion was the need to re-educate all the mages in the eastern army?

Don't joke with me. These staff officers roared as they rushed from the eastern army to the General Staff Office to raise their strong protest. However, what was revealed before them was something they couldn't have imagined.

“Instead of explaining, it would be faster if I showed you.”

After saying that, Captain Degurechaff recruited the officers who came to protest to be the examiners. The gimmick behind the test was simple. It was simply to test the applicants' ability to see through the basic Optical Decoy used by the enemy.

For example, the hologram before the applicants didn't have a solid body. And so, with a desk between them, it was possible to disguise it to a certain extent. But after watching for the whole day, even the staff officers who weren't mages could feel the dissonance. Mainly because the hologram was only moving its mouth and pretending to speak.

By using a voice synthesizer, a voice articulated the story Captain Degurechaff made up beforehand. If they listened carefully, they would be able to tell the voice came from the side.

These gimmicks that seem like annoyances to those who know the truth tricked almost everyone. Most of the applicants followed the order to head to the airbase and got sent back to their unit directly.

The truth of the matter might result in the eastern army receiving stern warnings. No, that was already confirmed. The staff officers who came from the eastern army were being looked at with accusatory eyes by the people from the General Staff Office.

“I see. I came to see for myself as the applicants kept failing, but I get it now.”

Deputy Chief of Logistics, Brigadier General Zettois who was representing his department smiled as he stared at the group from the eastern army coldly. *Just what have you lot been doing all this time?* —Such accusation was implied from the look of his eyes.

Deceiving the enemy with Optical Decoy wasn't anything new. It is written in the lesson plans that Optical Decoy was an effective way to counter the massed volley fire of the Republic army. Not just that, the Republic army often uses it on the battlefield, so countermeasures against Optical Decoy was seen as the fundamentals for Mages. Failing to pass the fundamental requirement was telling of their level of training.

"In comparison, half the veterans from the central army could see through the deception."

"Almost all of the applicants from the eastern army failed the same test, this is a big problem."

The high ranking officers shared their criticism. After hearing this, a staff officer tried to defend his men timidly:

"... Pardon me for asking, but instead of this being a problem with experience, isn't this because of the difference in skill level?"

His question was implying that this only happened because Captain Degurechaff was too skilled. At the very least, the eastern army knew that mages worthy of the Silver Wing Assault Medal were rare. That's why he asked whether this was because of the gulf in skill level instead of battle experience.

"This is a simple spell of casting an illusion with Optical Decoy. It is used in battle normally as decoys."

However, Captain Degurechaff's simple sentence had answered everything. Optical Decoy spells were used in live combat to deceive the enemy. The words spoken by someone who had survived massed volley fire from an enemy squadron carried a lot of weight. More importantly, half of the personnel despatched from central to the western front could see through this trick, which was an undisputable fact.

"Being turned around in circles before a non-existing examiner that was just a refraction of lights. I believe everyone can understand why I don't want to recruit these people."

"What are the results of the eastern army so far?"

“Out of the 29 groups of applicants, 27 of them were deceived and sent back to their unit.”

After hearing the administrative officer read out the report calmly, the inspectors who spent the entire day watching this comedy couldn't help but sigh.

The Operations Staff even started holding their head in agony while seriously contemplating the revamp of the regional armies' training program. A unit that was so easily deceived made them seriously doubt if they could fight a war.

“Even if you add in the 5 out of 10 groups from the central army that passed, that would just be one squadron.”

For the first test that was done in pairs, only a dozen qualified. Even if they were all selected, that would only be enough for a squadron. Just 25% of the target.

“We can only place our hopes on the remaining 65 groups from the eastern and southern army.”

His words were slightly hopeful, but his eyes were saying that it would be impossible.

“Going by the ratio, it would be useless.”

He then made the conclusion that refuted the overly optimistic prediction. The others who were listening arrived at the same conclusion. After giving up on defending their position, the officers from the east all hung their heads. They didn't want their unit to be branded as incompetent, but reality was cruel. The mages from the eastern army would probably be relegated to the sidelines for a while.

“... How about lowering the entry standards?”

“We would need to replace the current standards, and let them go through the test after retraining. It would waste a lot of time on rostering the unit.”

The officers from the Logistics Department looked disappointed, and started discussing what needed to be done during the re-selection. *Are you guys just messing around during training* — Many pairs of eyes glared at the staff officers with such a thought in mind. After all, lowering the standards would definitely increase the time to set up the unit.

The most troubling thing was how unbelievably long the training for the units would take. Those who weren't worried about this would have to be considered as special. A veteran getting used to the unit was completely different from training a recruit from the fundamentals. If the ability of the members differ too widely, the weaker ones would just get in the way, so the unit had to try adhering to the same standards.

Which means, if Captain Degurechaff wants to use the selected squadron to lay the foundation of her unit, it would take a very long time.

“How long specifically?”

“I would need about a month.”

Ironically, the thing that saved the eastern army group from the stinging atmosphere was these words from Captain Degurechaff.

Everyone couldn't help focusing their attention to her after she stated the timeline of one month, making them forget about the matter regarding the eastern army. Selection and training would normally take a very long time.

However, Captain Degurechaff had stated this without missing a single beat in front of the high ranking officers.

It means that in just one month, she would be able to turn these incompetent troops into serviceable soldiers.

If a normal Captain had said such a thing, they would just think he was boasting or was simply an idiot. After all, training the recruits would normally take two years. Even if the members were Mages with previous experience, forming a wing within a month was highly doubtful.

The words ‘impossible’, ‘it can't be done’ and ‘no chance’ were on the tip of everyone's tongues.

But Captain Degurechaff had an air about her that disregards all doubts. *I will train them for you to see.* If this wasn't backed up by her proven capabilities, it would be right to say her confidence was within the realm of arrogance.

The high ranking officers were all old enough to be the Captain's grandfather, but were suppressed by her aura. Her sense of presence and intimidation made them forget that they need to take the eastern army to task.

"Then it would be fine. It's fine to be a bit more forceful, retrain them properly."

He was probably the only one who expected such a situation. Brigadier General Zettois who was the Deputy Chief of Logistics grinned, he was granting Tanya permission to do what she needs as long as no one dies.

"Yes Sir."

Captain Degurechaff answered with a grin similar to her superior. Like a vampire who saw its prey. The smile was closer in essence to a kitten playing with its prey.

"Send the reports to the Training Department. Let them overhaul the training regime of the southern and eastern army."

"And make sure it's done flawlessly." The Brigadier General added on, as if he just thought about it. He had no intentions of escalating the preparedness of the regional army to the higher ups. Instead, he was interested in thoroughly retraining the army.

"It would be worrying if this carries on. This will be the common issue for combat training from now on."

Imperial Region Alpine Mountains Zugspitze Training Grounds

"O Lord, please grant me the strength to guide these lost sheep."

Altitude 8000 feet. At a height that went beyond the common sense of Aerial Mages, the voice echoing out sounded really sincere. Those who had a rebellious spirit were already beaten down. Right now, we were as docile as lambs, pushing our bodies that were on the verge of death to fly in the air. No, the truth was, we were forced to fly. My lungs craved for oxygen, whizzing as if I was asthmatic to suck in more air. Even though her consciousness was wavering, Visha still managed to control her Operation Orb. If her sense of time wasn't too affected by her faltering mind, it happened about 5 days ago.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I will give you a choice. Shoot me down or enjoy this training.”

Just when we were exhausted and sleeping like corpses. Compared to our times in the Rhines, there were beds here, so it seems that Captain Degurechaff had a gentle side too... And yet as soon as I had let my guard down and fallen asleep, I was startled wide awake after the entire dormitory and I was blown away by magic bombardments. I grabbed my Operation Orb and shovel, and deployed my Protective Barrier. As we crawled out from the debris, what we saw was the brave smile of Captain Degurechaff. Seeing the face I had gotten used to at the Rhines frontlines was bad for the heart, it was worse than any of Erya's pranks.

The rifle with a bayonet attached made her look like a vampire who was overjoyed by the prospect of hunting humans. The blade that was polished to a shine was waiting expectantly for mages to lose their guard before it. Ignoring the darkness of the night, it reflected the bright moonlight. The Operation Orb hanging on her chest was filled with mana, not making any effort to hide her intention to attack if anyone showed an opening.

“Listen up, for the next one week, all of you will be undergoing battlefield combat movement training in zone B13.”

On the map she prepared without us noticing, three spots were marked. According to the gist of the training content, we need to set off right away and move with full speed to the first checkpoint. The time limit was 48 hours.

All means were permitted, and the key point was to not fall out. Marching were the basics of a unit, and this was strictly taught in Cadet School too. But could you please remove the condition that artillery would be called in together with magical bombardment if any mana was detected?

Concealing the mana while on the march was an incredibly difficult task. Even Visha who accumulated plenty of experience in the Rhines Frontlines was no exception. Most importantly, they were blown away together with the dormitory. Their only possessions were the tools they successfully protected when they deployed their protection barrier. Even water was scarce. Going on a non-magic assisted march in such a condition? Fighting a battle in real life would be easier — It made them want to cry.

However, after enduring extreme hardship and arriving at the second checkpoint, they received the order to engage in Optical warfare. The training content had been changed because the artillery unit was bored.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I am really happy to see that no one has dropped out.”

The moment we saw the Captain showing her rare smile, everyone felt a chill down their spine. That smile meant that something more terrible would be unveiled, and Visha who understood this couldn't help lamenting God — This was too much.

That smile seemed to be saying ‘oh, so that wasn't tough enough? I didn't think it would be this easy’. If not, it was saying ‘seems like I can be harsher’... God, I hate you.

No matter how much I hated it, I understand that the Captain was more than happy to accommodate us by raising the training difficulty level.

“Thanks to everyone's excellent performance, the artillery saved a lot of ammunition.”

What would happen next goes without saying. The Captain was all smiles as she kicked all the members, including Visha, into the abyss of despair.

“Everyone, it is bad manners to ostracize your comrades. Let's have some fun together with the artillery unit.”

After saying that, Captain Degurechaff casted a spell and sent out a heat wave. From the direction she was aiming, a training round flew this way. An artillery unit was shelling the check point.

Artillery bombardment onto a fixed location. It was a simple bombardment, and it would be strange if it doesn't hit. She actually said ‘Well done ladies and gentlemen, you have impressed me’?

“What impressive techniques. Even though this is just training, you have done well in evading the magic observation of the artillery. That was splendid, but it would be terrible if you couldn't block artillery attacks. Taking precautions against such possibility is training too. So for the combined training with the artillery, let's conduct a base defence training. Consider this a defensive battle. Starting now, you

lot have 15 minutes to fortify your base. Don't worry, their stocks for training rounds are really low. They will probably run out after 36 hours of continuous fire."

With her cutish yet hateful voice, she announced the next itinerary of the field trip cheerfully. In the next instant, Visha charged over in tears to construct the base. She never dreamt that she would ever have a day when she thought how reliable her shovel was.

"Alright, ladies and Gentlemen, if you don't want to die, then engage the incoming rounds. If anyone deviates from the assigned route, I will conduct magical bombardment."

Ah, that would be lethal. Thinking back, I recall there were low-powered shells mixed in to 'wake us up', so this wasn't a surprise. After all, she was Captain Degurechaff. She would definitely keep her word. If we don't want to die — there was no falsehood behind this.

The artillery fired nonstop. Even though I prepared myself mentally, I couldn't stop my tears from rolling when I thought about what we would be facing next.

"Lord, please protect your servant who exalts you. Please show me your might and glory."

Aside from the Captain who deployed a majestic protection barrier, everyone else charged forth to intercept the falling shells. From this range, there were several minutes before the rounds hit. They could observe and shoot down the rounds with trajectory that could hit. It sounds simple, but saps an astonishing amount of energy.

There were 72 trainees. However, even with two Wings of people, we were not proficient in defending and in building an interception network against the bombardment directed by forward observers. Most importantly, if we fail to intercept the rounds successfully, it would deal heavy damage.

The bombardment was like the continuous effort of all the artillery in the region. If we hadn't thought of the idea of putting in the effort to identify the live rounds mixed in with the training rounds, they would definitely be wiped out. Also, the bombardment carried on sporadically into the wee hours of the night, pushing the

trainees to exhaustion and straining their eyes, making everyone feel despair. Most importantly, if your partner messed up, both of you would be blown away together.

Even so, if anyone fortified only their own defences, someone else would be blown away. They could only trust their comrades, anyone who couldn't do that would be 'eliminated' mercilessly. It was just like the frontlines, and we were pushed to our limits. In the end, I didn't sleep properly at all during the defence of the base.

Finally, 36 hours later, the Captain pointed to the radio sheepishly:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the artillery unit says they still have ammunition left."

Immediately after that, the familiar sound screaming through the air drew near once more. The artillery renewed their shelling. And it was right after everyone got relaxed. It shook the mages who were barely holding on. Turning and running for one's life might be natural instinct, but there was hell to pay.

The trainees once again witness the Captain honoring her words with pleasure. In the end, even though the bombardment was going to end, the number of cadets had fallen to 60 odds. Right after this, they headed straight for the third checkpoint. There wasn't any complicated conditions this time, they just needed to advance forward. Aside from the time limit, there were no further explanations. In other words, virtually no intelligence was provided.

"Pay attention, ladies and gentlemen, you are on a march."

Visha who only received this instruction braced herself for the worse, anything could happen and she must never let her guard down; she advanced timidly. Even though squadrons armed with explosives would fly by at low altitude to search, it would be fine if they don't find her; Even though she caught sight of Doberman dogs raised by the army, she just needed to avoid them. Every situation could be avoided.

But she maintained her vigilance, thinking there must be a trick behind this. But as if she was being mocked, they didn't run into any mean spirited traps. They were really just marching along. It goes without saying that the time limit could only be kept if the exhausted mages proceeded at full speed.

After glancing at Visha and the others who were completely exhausted, she waited with a smile at the third checkpoint. She said: "Well done, let's begin anti-interrogation training."

The group that made it through anti-interrogation training while exhausted were thrown directly into the alps. That was a dream they didn't want to remember. As Visha groaned terribly in a way a teenage girl shouldn't as she struggled on the verge of death, the Captain marched alongside her nonchalantly. She was either the apostle of the devil or a herald of God.

Ah, there was actually an ally I fear more than the enemy. On top of that, the Captain had no humanity at all. I can bet my beating heart on it, a few of us saw the Captain sending someone who fainted during training flying with a kick, and when we realized it, that person was already despatched back to his unit. I had certainly peeked into the abyss of death.

On this Alpine mountains 7,000 feet above sea level, I was caught in an avalanche, unable to move as I lay prone on the ground as I had fractured my leg. But I definitely saw it. Even if I tell my comrades about it, they would never believe me.

"Imbecile. How does it feel to be unable to avoid an avalanche, and hold your teammates back?"

The Captain showered me with vulgarities, but I know. I saw it. The Captain charged into the avalanche to save me.

Even though my comrades told me that after I was terribly injured, and was thrown like a rag to him by the Captain, didn't believe me either. The Captain was unquestionably a good commander. However, I can't really figure her out as a fellow human being. The truth was, everyone was cursing out our superior officer with a laugh.

What crazy comrades. Maybe they were affected by the Captain's insanity too. Despite that, I received a revelation from God, asking me to save the Empire, and saying — You are the elite troops led by the apostle that protects the realm of God.

What an insane world. If the Captain was really an apostle of God, then only devils would exist in this world. No, I should say she was the reason. The gods in mythical worlds would show us their existence through real world phenomenons. Church doctrines were set for the sake of God, not determined by a select few for the sake of man.

Even so, there was no telling what you would encounter in life.

It was impossible to train elites in just one month. Yes, this was simply common sense.

But since I gave my word in front of the group of high ranking officers, it was too late to regret it now.

The truth was, if I failed, it would be a big problem. And it would hurt my resume, with my punishment being a frontline deployment. But if I guide the conclusion so that the issue lies with the quality of this bunch, that they couldn't be nurtured even by Captain Degurechaff, the meaning would change completely.

Since the higher ups had the tendency of hiding their dirty laundry, they might even call off the entire thing. On top of that, Tanya received permission from the Logistics Department to use any means necessary. And so, if she pushed the trainees to their very limit, they would definitely give up.

And so, she just needed to give them unbearable training, and let them earn the evaluation of being gutless people who didn't have the will to follow things through to the end, and everything would be resolved.

I would escape unscathed. So I decided to employ the training methods used all over the world throughout human history. The American style menu was as follows: changing underwater acclimation training to altitude acclimation training. This would literally force them to endure to the limit of their willpower.

After completing this training, what follows next would be the infamous hell week. They would sleep for a total of 4 hours in four days. It was said that this could push people to the absolute limit, a training that could expose the cruelty of human nature. Even though mages could segmentate their mind, there was a limit to that.

If I could expose the fact that they were morons who value themselves over their comrades, I could eliminate them with the reason that they were not fit to be Imperial soldiers.

And of course, I don't want to torment my subordinates. I wasn't that retarded to feel elation from meaningless violence. I would add in appropriate reasons, and make everything legitimate. I didn't want to use violence meaninglessly.

That's why I welcome withdrawals anytime; or rather, I really hope they could hurry up and withdraw. Set me free from this heavy responsibility earlier. So withdraw quickly, come on. Anyway, after enduring hell week, that would be followed by one week of SERE¹. A demanding training in anti-interrogation and wilderness survival.

If I could push them to the edge of insanity, they probably would withdraw immediately. If they still don't give up, I have the perfect plan for these war crazed bastards. They must be completely exhausted after going through SERE right after hell week.

This would be followed by a long distance marching exercise through the alpine mountains while prohibiting magic use.

And of course, sleeping and resting time would be cut down as much as possible. Conditions would follow the standard of the harshest battle on record. For example, there would only be half a bottle of water and no food provided. Trainees would be disqualified if they use their Operation Orb. The only thing they could use was a knife that was to be shared between a pair of trainees.

It would be easier to describe it to have a harsher, tighter schedule than the Staff Officer tour. They would need to cross the treacherous terrains of the alps in one week, and would be disqualified on the spot if they fail to do so. Doing so in one week would normally be a very trying task, and that was for someone who was healthy and challenging it with all their equipment.

If anyone accomplished that under such terrible conditions, then I was definitely cursed. Simply put, who ever makes a mistake here would be mercilessly eliminated. By following this process, I will definitely receive appropriate results.

¹ **Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE)** is a program, best known by its military acronym, that provides training in evading capture, survival skills, and the military code of conduct.

Don't worry, I know that accidents might happen. But I have prepared a perfect insurance.

To make this clear, this was a plan I absolutely don't want to use. I never asked for this. But there was no other surer way than this.

So I had no choice but to prepare this insurance reluctantly.



That was to use the newly developed mass production prototype developed by that madman in Elinium as standard equipment. I heard that walking disaster — Chief Engineer Adelaide von Schugel was developing the Elinium Type 97 ‘Mobile Assault’ Operation Orb.

It was very possible that thing might develop in a way such that the higher ups would get that damn Chief Engineer to take responsibility.

Yes, there was a period of time where I thought so too. So why did things turn out this way? Was my life really cursed? Or could humanity truly hold infinite potential? Perhaps it is also important to having to truly believe in it.

Yet, when looking back. One must also eliminate all optimism. Learn from your past mistakes.

When remembering. Most of your failures stemmed from yourself. There were many instances when things were beyond salvaging after realizing.

By the time I realized, I was already standing on a podium — Just as I was about to complain of having low blood pressure, and that it was hard to get up in the morning, a wave of overwhelming sleepiness assaulted my consciousness once more. But through bits and pieces, my ears caught parts of what my mouth was uttering.

Today, all of you shall graduate from being worthless maggots. From this day, you are Mages of the Imperial Army.

With the bonds of battle binding you, until the day you die, no matter where you are, the army shall be your brethrens, your comrades.

You will be heading into the battlefield in the future. And some won't be able to return. Remember that.

All Imperial soldiers will die one day. We exist for the sake of death, but the Empire will live forever. And so — all of you will live on forever! The Empire looks forward to everyone fighting for it for eternity.

... How did I end up saying these words?

I had no recollection of uttering them, but memories of these words still lingered in my mind. What happened before and after that speech was fuzzy. Regrettably, perhaps it was due to the activation of the Elinum Type 95 during training, but it had once more made me realize that I had lost a part of my memory. This was why I hated that thing.

Even though I was supposed to be in my growth period, I wasn't growing any taller and had to be mindful when making custom uniforms. My height was something I had began to grow in concern of. Especially when surrounded by soldiers with bulky builds or female Mages who looked like seasoned veterans (a minority).

Sigh, for white collar desk jockey who also requires stamina, this was a cause for concern. Healthy work results starts from a healthy body. Even though I pay attention to my diet, I fail to see any changes. It was strange to think that eating K-brot would help me grow taller though.

Anyway, as a person, I did not want to waste too much effort, I just need to grow taller. And so, I went to enquire the military doctor why I wasn't growing even though I should be in my growing period. That's right, when I realized it, I had already asked the doctor: "What should I do to get bigger?"

The doctor said my growth was slow because of my imbalance in muscle training. I just need to sleep and eat adequately, and I would get bigger naturally. Her bemused look puzzled me for a while.

After thinking it through, I felt the urge to grab my rifle and shoot out my skull to erase this memory.

As a woman, the military doctor had a curvy body. May disaster befall the General Staff Office that was concerned about such things. She just had to show me concern as a member of the same gender? Worse of all, this was all because I was

accused of refuting religious faith due to being a man one-sidedly back then. I didn't think it was possible, but would I be brainwashed and want to grow up as a woman?

No, it was dangerous to reach a decision on circumstantial evidence alone. Even though it was true that the Elinum Type 95 had left me many unpleasant memories, my mind was only controlled when it was activated.

From the records that I could verify, I couldn't find any trace of my mind being manipulated. However, I had a feeling that things were heading in a regrettable direction. Damn devil, you, the lot of you, how dare you toy with the persona of someone who loves freedom so much?

... When I realized it, there was a rosary I had no recollection of on my neck.

The Virgin Mary? Yes, I often see that in the church. I know very well. I see the sisters handing these rosaries out. That's right, I simply watch from the side.

... Stop running and face reality.

Why didn't I realize I was wearing a rosary? No, before that, when did I start losing my memories?

This was terrible. I couldn't trust my memories anymore. Even if this was given by the church, it felt quite aged. If I had to say, it had the historical style and aura about it.

To make it clearer, if it was found in the right era, it might be safekept by the church as a holy relic. If possible, I would like to find the chance to throw it far away in a secluded place; if it could be done, I would want to donate it somewhere right now, and dump it away.

...To wear such a thing on my neck, I must be terribly ill.

I remember conducting training, that was true. I wanted to use the selection process as an excuse to fail everyone, everything so far was fine. My memories for the past month were clear. But, I felt that... something wasn't right.

"... I shouldn't have activated it at 8,000 feet."

That's right, activating the Elinium Type 95 unconsciously in order to increase altitude was a crucial mistake. Perhaps it is time to consider the possibility that the mental corruption was cumulative. Apart from temporarily having my speech manipulated, the accumulated corruption appears to continue to build up similar to that of mineral poisoning.

"Should I seek medical examination for the corruption of the mind? What reason should I use?"

The stringent check up organization was researching how magic related technology was affecting one's mind. I just need to trust the skills of that bunch, they once announced in an anti-interrogation research conference that they developed the technology that could see through irregularity in thoughts. Maybe I should accept an examination while I could still think straight.

However, the reason would be a problem. If I was thought of as a commander with mental problems, it might affect my future life, including my resume. In the Empire where the concept of gender equality was still underdeveloped, women in management weren't rare, but they would naturally require stringent quality. If I want to become a white collar worker, it wouldn't be good to have the reputation of having some mental problems.

A rhythmic knocking broke my action of grabbing my head in agony. The one who entered the room was Visha, who was gradually getting the hang of her duties as an adjutant. I could smell trouble from the expression on her face. I cleared away all thoughts that could wait. I switched my mind into work mode.

"Captain, there's a letter from the General Staff Office."

"Thank you. Do I need to reply immediately?"

If there was a troubling matter, Tanya wanted as much time as possible to deal with it.

"Yes Mdm, there's an envoy waiting outside."

"What?"

Captain Degurechaff glanced at her, picked up a pen immediately and read the proffered letter.

It was sent from the General Staff Office. The main content was ‘finish the rostering of your unit, and head to the base in the southeastern military zone for deployment immediately. Top priority.’

“Captain Degurechaff? What’s the matter?”

“...Too soon. This is too soon. Lieutenant, help me call the General Staff Office.”

She instructed the confused Second Lieutenant to call the General Staff Office. However, at this moment, that person appeared before her as if he had predicted such an action. No, he definitely expected this. That was why a high ranking staff officer was despatched from the General Staff Office to meet a mere Captain.

“No, you don’t need to make that call, Major Degurechaff.”

“Eh, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen. You came here personally?”

It was her friend, Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen. A kind soldier with common sense, who tried his best to avoid sending children onto the battlefield.

“That’s right, congratulations on your promotion, Major. I am here as an envoy. You must have many questions for me.”

The Lieutenant Colonel conveyed the notification as if he was performing routine business. She didn’t mind the news of her promotion, but it smelled like trouble. And going out of their way in sending a high ranked staff officer from the General Staff Office to hand the promotion papers for a mere Wing commander didn’t make sense.

“... Thank you for your concern, Lieutenant Colonel. Please leave us, Lieutenant.”

“Yes Mdm, allow me to take my leave.”

She immediately dismissed all other parties, including her adjutant, creating as much as a secured space as possible, so both parties could proceed to the main agenda. Regarding my promotion. I could sense subtly that this would involve the Wing as a whole. In other words, the Wing would need to be ready for live combat. Tanya wondered if she could use the excuse of inadequate training and setting up the organization to buy more time.

“Very well, Lieutenant Colonel Sir, may I ask what this is all about?”

Deploying in the southeastern base was originally scheduled to be done after the preliminary matters for the formation of the unit had been done. After all, there was a possibility that they would be deployed to the north or west according to how the war goes. But the order was to report to the southeastern base immediately.

Conventionally, a newly rostered unit would be given half a year to train. It was too strange to consider the unit battle ready so early.

“The numbers are now 48. The higher ups feel that the rostering is completed with this.”

“That’s right, the rostering is done, but the unit is not ready.”

Amateurs might misunderstand easily, but completing the rostering didn’t mean the unit was ready. If they were to be utilized as a combat force, it would take some time to completely fine tune the command structure and build up cooperative relationships. If not, it would just be a unit in numbers. Politician might not understand, but the General Staff Office whose job was to set up such units should understand this perfectly.

That was the scary part. She had to assume that something bad enough has happened, that they had no choice but to issue such an unreasonable order despite knowing this.

“There are no problems with personnel and equipment. The General Staff Office holds you in high regards.”

“Please do not joke with me, Lieutenant Colonel. Right now, we haven’t mastered team exercises, practical field training, nor tied down the command structures. We are no different from a training Wing right now.”

“Which means, you think your unit would be limited operational wise?”

“Of course. Please give me half a year for training.”

Forming an organization would naturally take time. Letting the unit members know each other and build up adequate relationships would take at least half a year. Even if they ignore this fact, repeated training was necessary to let the members learn to fight together.

“The brass believes that if it is you who completed preliminary training in just a month, heading to the front line tomorrow to fight wouldn’t be a problem.”

“Are they speaking in jest? A newly formed unit is nowhere near the same level as a battle ready unit.”

On paper, the two units that had been rostered might look the same. But if one of the two was a freshly rostered unit, while the other one had been through live combat, and had received adequate resupply and rest, the difference was obvious. Time was absolutely needed to plan adequate training and tie down the system within the group.

“Even if training starts right after the unit is founded, some time would still need to be set aside to work out the kinks after the preliminary training. That is common sense.”

“Is it possible to commit them into battle right after founding the unit? The higher ups believe that if it is you, it would be possible.”

The answer she was given couldn’t be considered a reason at all.

“If they wish to, they could deploy me as a sole combatant. That is possible, but would that be fine?”

Because she knew they wouldn’t send her out alone, that’s why she said that. After all, it was impossible to transfer the commander of a unit being rostered away, that’s why Tanya was so forceful.

“But if they want me to utilize the strength of a Wing, that would be a completely different matter.”

Even so, it is ridiculous to expect fresh recruits to take on the job of battle ready tasks. It was like admitting they couldn’t spare the effort to train new recruits, there was also no veterans left on the battlefield. In other words; this was a symptom of a terminal disease.

“...Major, the Imperial Army can't spare the effort anymore.”

“...To the extent that we need to commit a Mage Wing that has yet to finish their training into battle?”

“As all the Mages in the continental army are congregated in the west, the war in the north is becoming dangerous.”

Currently, the Mages are all gathered in the west. This was because most of the Mages from the continental army went there. However, the regional armies still have a large number of Mages on hand. As the Federation was already on the verge of death, the northern army was more than enough to handle them.

That was exactly why I want to know the reason in deploying a unit so urgently to the southeast which was far from the frontlines. The act of forcefully speeding up the schedule and deploying the unit in the rear, was a foolish act akin to ruining wine that would increase in value if left alone. Or neglecting care on cheese.

“That is why I don't understand. Why is it the southeast?”

If the situation in the north requires reinforcement, she could still understand that they lacked manpower. It would be an easily understood reason. But sending a unit in the complete opposite direction from the frontlines despite lacking manpower made her really suspicious.

“This is the decision of the General Staff Office.”

“Am I permitted to enquire about it?”

“It would violate military secrets. Please do your best in the southeastern base to build up your unit's combat readiness, until you receive further orders.”

He didn't explain the politics behind it. In that case, she had to deduce it by herself, which would probably be a waste of time. In the end, she just had to pay attention as there was a reason why the General Staff Office despatched a unit directly under their purview to the southeast.

“If the purpose is to be battle ready, please permit me to lead a fully trained unit.”

“The training level of your Wing should be above standard in terms of readiness.”

“Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen, I am obligated to raise an appeal. It would be too rash to deploy the unit now. This would hinder our preparation, and result in the Wing failing to operate at its full potential.”

A probing question. Any normal Wing Commander would give fair warning that the time given for training a unit was too little.

“I have noted your warning. But it would be best for you to consider that things won’t change.”

What she got was the formal reply from Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen. If his strong tone was representative of the will of the higher ups, that means this was an unshakable fixed decision.

“I understand, Sir.”

So she could only give up. However, this level of instructions could be dealt with by using official documents and orders. Why did they went out of their way and sent someone here? This question still lingered in her heart. The answer to this question was shown in the nonchalant chatter by Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen who was acting as if he had completed his duty as an envoy, and had started tidying his bags.

“Oh right, as a senior in life, let me give you an advice. Since you get to be deployed in the southeast, want to try learning Dacian?”

“Huh? Dacian?”

“There are no downsides to learning languages. Especially for us soldiers.”

Normally speaking, what he said was normal. But why ask her to learn Dacian specifically? There were two possibilities. Either Dacia would become an ally or an enemy. If they were allies, there would be a need to communicate with them; if they became enemy, it would be useful in scouting for enemy intelligence.

“If I have the time, I will learn it as another skill. Thank you for the advice, Lieutenant Colonel.”

“Excellent. Let me congratulate you on your promotion again, Wing Commander Degurechaff.”

CE 1924 September 24th Ransylvania Province Turao County Imperial Army field training grounds

The Wing received orders to garrison the base they were assigned. And the final stage of their inspection was several days after their orders came down.

Pressured by the Logistics Department, the inspection was forced to be held early in order to accommodate the relocation plan. As it was a unit that was formed in a short period, all the high ranking staff officers were worried about the unit’s level of training. But their worries were betrayed in a good way. After all, all the high ranking staff officers witnessed an unexpected sight, which made them dumbfounded that day.

“You dim witted fools! Stop dragging your feet and increase your altitude!”

“It’s just 8,000 feet, you imbeciles. You want me to repeat myself?”

Since just now, the radio had been broadcasting a calm and emotionless voice. It might be hard to believe, but these words all came from a girl whose voice had yet to break. Her mana was flickering ominously, showing her intention of shooting down anyone who attempted to lower their altitude.

“You want me to say it again? Very well. Then die. Die right now. The money we can save from you dying will go straight to your comrades.”

If there were any complaints, she would start magic bombardment seriously. Be it losing consciousness or mana exhaustion, lowering your altitude meant being shot down. The Mages who didn’t believe she would carry out such an exaggerated declaration would learn literally what ‘seeing is believing’ means.

“Alright, if you don’t want to die for the cause, increase your altitude.”

The performance today was extraordinary too.

“Since Mages from the Republic can reach an altitude of 8,000 feet, we should aim for 10,000.”

After uttering these words, in front of the inspectors, Major Degurechaff ordered her unit to increase altitude at full speed immediately. Normally, combat beyond the altitude of 6,000 feet was considered suicidal, but she ignored that limit and set her target at 8,000 feet.

She might be eccentric, but she really was crazy when she declared that she would 'turn the incompetent into the elite' in one month. That wasn't bragging. Major Degurechaff really did it. She seriously retrained the soldiers from their very core, forcefully turning them into elites.

"Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen, does this meet your expectations?"

I wish to attend the review parade of the 601st rostering unit. Major Degurechaff accepted Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen's request easily. Her attitude seemed to be saying that there wouldn't be any problems.

No, there really weren't any problems. At the very least, there were no deaths during training. And the Mage Wing before him was elite in terms of skill, just like she said.

"Exceptional."

He couldn't say anything other than that. She was a genius in pushing soldiers to their limit. Forcing the troops to the very edge, literally squeezing out the last drop of their capability.

He heard the content of her training was to let the trainees experience the horrors equivalent to death, and increasing their ability drastically that way. If they were stalked by the horror of death for a whole month, it would definitely increase their abilities greatly, that was understandable. He felt sympathetic towards the soldiers who were tormented that way.

"... They don't have any oxygen tanks, so how did they reach an altitude of 8000 feet?"

The engineering officers present were shocked from a different perspective. They might be trained, but they still reached a height of 8,000 feet nonchalantly. If it was Major Degurechaff, it wouldn't be surprising for her to reach 12,000 feet. But a group of soldiers flying at that height had major implications.

“Oh, that’s simple.”

However, the Military Police who was explaining treated it like an after meal chatter, answering casually.

“They seemed to be deploying a refined spell to create oxygen all the time.”

Until everyone understood what that meant, the crowd was completely silent. All the time, in other words, they were casting the spell on themselves permanently.

“... You are saying they are maintaining two permanent spells?”

“Yes. I think that was the minimum standard requested of them.”

The Military Police officer wasn’t an engineer, and couldn’t feel how revolutionary this was, unlike the professionals.

But the engineering personnel from the General Staff Office were all shocked beyond words. Not only did they turn rowdy, a number of them were mumbling ‘how is that possible?’ That’s right. Casting multiple magic spells. Theoretically, this was impossible.

There were several projects focusing on just that in the Technological Research Lab, and they were successful. But an Operation Orb that could withstand the rigors of battle while casting dual permanent spells should be far from complete. Everyone was chattering about where she got those things from.

“Where did they get the Operation Orbs that could withstand such unreasonable demands?”

Even an Orb that wasn’t officially commissioned to be used by the military; he didn’t know where he got the prototype from, but her network was really well laid. Very impressive.

She was an exceptionally talented soldier. It wouldn’t be strange if any military lab requested her to test out new Orb prototypes. In actual fact, his deduction was on point.

“It’s the first batch of mass produced orbs commissioned from Elinium Lab.”

Ah, if it was that place, it was understandable. She worked in technology development at that place for a period of time after all. She probably used that connection.

Since it was a commission made to Elinum Lab which was privy to many secrets, this would not have been possible if implicit consent wasn't given by the procurement branch from the General Staff Office, and even the Logistics Department. If not for that, it wouldn't be a surprise if the Military Police started sloughing it out with Major Degurechaff right now.

“Who told you lot to make such monotonous movements!? You want to be a target board!?”

The members of the Wing struggled to fly steadily at the altitude of 8,000 feet. As if she was mocking their sluggishness, Major Degurechaff's agility as she soared through the sky made the people sigh in admiration, saying 'as expected of a Named'. Compared to the trainees who were as slow as a tortoise, the Major was as swift as a swallow.

“Good. Put it into practice.”

“B... Begin random evasive maneuvers! Hurry up!”

“... Unbelievable. They can perform random evasive maneuvers while deploying two permanent spells?”

The content of the performance made the Mages serving in Wings among the audience lost. Their agile movement as if they were playing hide and seek made them feel ashamed.

But in the eyes of experts, this was a series of unbelievable events. Not only did they performed with mobility that was nigh impossible with modern technology, they could withstand random evasive maneuvers on the level of fighter planes. Such an Operation Orb was a fantastical existence.

No, not just that. Several of the Mages started casting Optical Decoys in earnest to evade attacks.

“They can even deploy decoys.”

This meant the power of the Operation Orb could spare the effort to cast Optical Decoys while performing random evasive maneuvers.

From what they observed, the deployment speed and deceptiveness of the decoy were really high. There were several decoys that seemed to be moving by their own will. What amazing performance. And it had been designed for mass production, and had successful mass production to show for it.

“... The new product from Elinium Lab is better than I imagined.”

This was the Orb for the next generation, that was the only thing that came to his mind. Anyone who witnessed this scene wouldn't be able to refute that. Not only were they conducting an endurance test right now, the performance of the Orb was also amazing.

At most, the problem would be the cost. But if they decide to mass produce it officially, they could slash the price drastically.

“Get me the information from Elinium Lab.”

“Understood. I will get it done, Lieutenant Colonel Sir.”

After Lieutenant Colonel Lehrgen despatched his adjutant to requisition for the documents, he raised his head to watch the trails in the air. It was really exemplary aerial movement. So beautiful that it would captivate anyone watching. Were her talent and personality inversely proportionate? The fact that he was thinking this way seemed to prove how nasty his own character was, and left a bad taste in his mouth.

“This is a good chance. Show your worth to the inspectors reviewing the parade.”

“Major Degurechaff, wouldn't that be too harsh on them?”

But when he heard the words of encouragement she was telling her unit through the radio, a question surfaced in Lehrgen's mind. He heard that Tanya hated having her troops suffer losses. If that was so, the content of this performance was too daunting. With the objective of nurturing talents in mind, this was actually overdoing it.

“No, this much shouldn’t be a problem. Please enjoy the performance of the talent I picked after I remove their incompetence.”

But her answer deepened this question. Why? The concept of selection and rejection was the topic she made a speech on when she was in OCS. She mentioned ‘It is my duty to stop the Imperial army from being infected by the disease known as incompetence’. The way she was putting it felt more like eliminating candidates than nurturing talents.

“There still should be a limit. You achieved results, but half of the candidates still dropped out.”

So why?

“I already secured the manpower for the overstrength Wing. There shouldn’t be any problems in terms of human resource.”

“I see. I understand now, please continue. I won’t disturb you further.”

Ah, damn it. I get it now, I finally get it. Resource. That’s right, human resource. She called the soldiers human resource.

So to you, the troops were a type of resource known as human, something that could be replenished.

I see, I understood what was wrong now. That girl — Major Degurechaff, was treating people as numbers used in calculations.

Even though staff officers with extreme ideals were not rare, she was actually treating humans as resources and calculating them as such. If that was so, then her actions made sense. She was very proficient in committing resources efficiently.

“I understand. I get it now. That was definitely written by you.”

He had the impression of seeing the concept of total war and world war somewhere before. And the source was right beside him. That was why he found it familiar.

The insanity in numbers. The madness of the world. Does the fault lie with the world?

It was a bad era to be a soldier. War broke out when there was a hated person around. If that damn bastard of a God does exist, he must be in league with the devil in this era.

“Sigh, is it her who is mad, or is it this world?”

The scene before him made him feel that it was describing all this. Sigh, seeing through her true nature was such a horrifying thing. That girl was a monster.

No one knew if the sighs of the staff officers were in lament or admiration. However, an emergency report from the borders blew their worries and muttering away.

“Emergency report. An army from Dacia is invading our borders. They are heading towards Hermannstadt.”

Dacia, army and invading borders. Without the need to think further, just combining these words was enough to tell how simple and annoying the situation was. The terrible news from the borders meant war. We were going to fight a war with yet another country.

“Stop the parade! Stop! All personnels fall in immediately. I repeat, all personnels fall in immediately!”

The next moment, the roar of various commanders calling for the parade to stop echoed within the training ground.

“The 203rd Aerial Mage Wing is to stop the parade immediately, and link up with the border battalion!”

The personnel in the command post were running around in a panic, shouting into the radios and telephones in order to contact others. The sound of information being received and disseminated mixed together noisily. Everyone here abandoned the parade and sprinted at full speed, giving no regards on getting mud onto their dress uniform.

The staff officers inspecting the parade weren't given specific combat roles, and headed for the command post they had left momentarily. Lieutenant Colonel

Lehrgen was one of them, and even though he was dashing amidst the commotion, he could still feel a chill.

“World War. Such a ridiculous thing...”

Will it really happen? He was about to mutter to himself.

But the one who cut off his words was Major Degurechaff who arrived at the command post a moment later.

“I’ve had enough, Lieutenant Colonel. Why must the Empire fight a war against the world?”

Tanya was slower than her subordinates because of the difference in strides. She felt frustrated by her short legs as she stomped onto the ground with her boots, and protested angrily:

“Those Darja fools, they seem really enthusiastic about teaching the Empire a lesson on behalf of the world. Quite the unexpected display of international cooperation.”

Her anxiety stemmed from the prospective of a ‘World War’. An anxiety on the scale of global warfare.

This might seem ridiculous, but Major Tanya von Degurechaff was feeling frustrated because of her crazy prediction that in the future, the Empire would have to take on the entire world.

“Very well, if it is a fight they want we will give it to them, those dumb pigs. No, I should say, I will cook you nice and well!”

... Oh god, is this... Is this situation a part of your will?

End of Volume 1 Deus Lo Vult

Empire Territory

Hostile Nations

Contested Territory

Neutral Nations

Federation

Norden

United Kingdoms

Union

Ostland

Empire

Republic

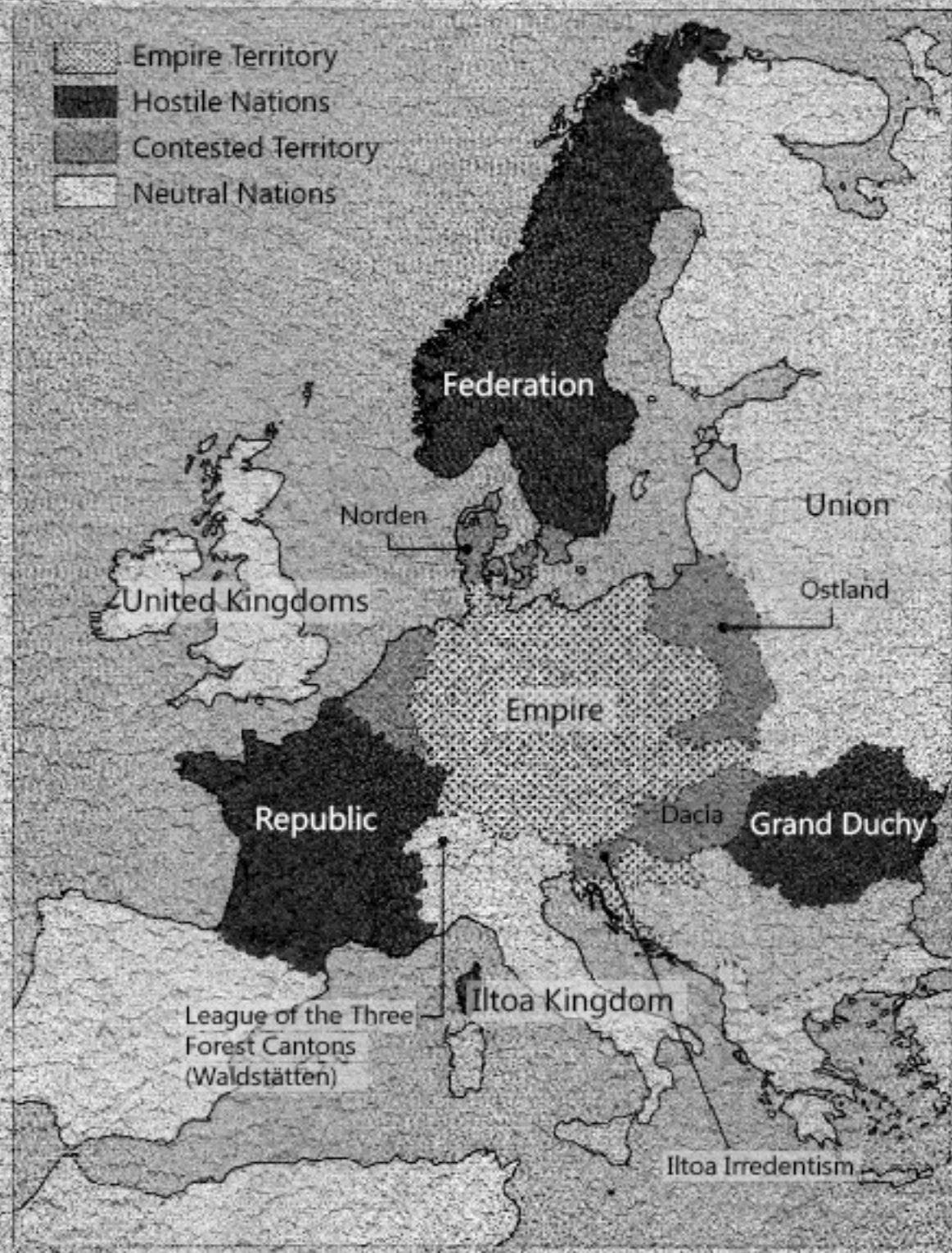
Dacia

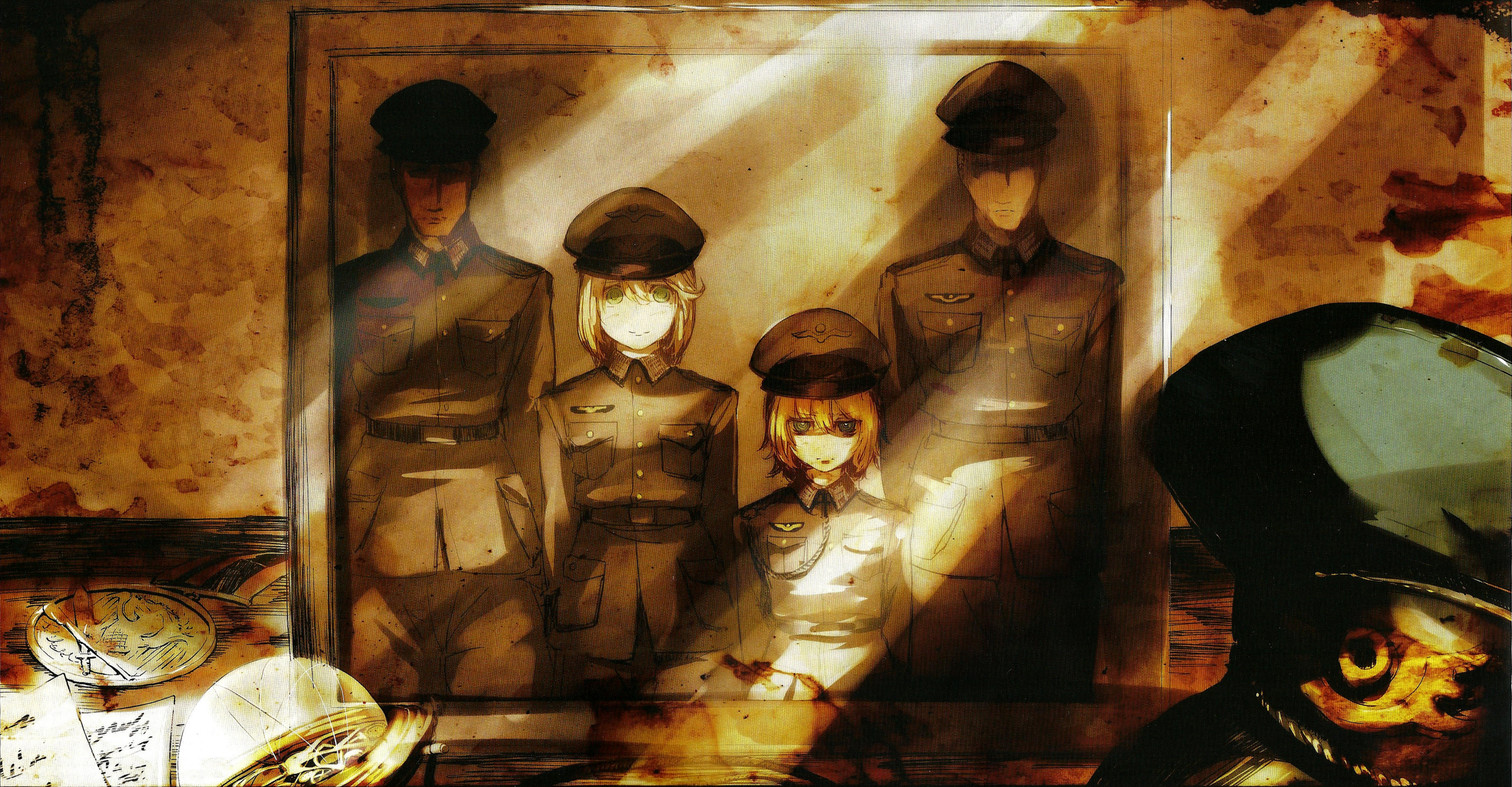
Grand Duchy

League of the Three
Forest Cantons
(Waldstätten)

Iltoa Kingdom

Iltoa Irredentism





Afterword

Before giving my greetings, I would first like to say one thing. The publisher known as Enterbrain definitely has a few screws loose in their head.

The title of this series is called 『War Chronicles of a Little Girl』 <幼女戦記 youjo senki>. The content is filled with nothing but a bizarre mix of religion, ideology and nationalism beliefs. Despite of this, not a single soul had made any demands for revision during the review process. Just how courageous could they be?

If this was not a bad joke or one of those prankster game shows, and no misunderstandings were made then by now this work should have arrived in the hands of the readers. That's right, the series known as 『War Chronicles of a Little Girl』, if this wasn't the end product of a mass hallucination caused by both you and I, then without a doubt it really exists.

Although I still feel confounded by how it had happened, in the end this work was able to be released without any hitch. And so, please allow me to express my gratitude to the website 「Arcadia-sama (<http://www.mai-net.net/>)」 for being the birth place of this work, and to the Administrator Mai-san and all of the readers who had commented and supported me along the way.

To everyone who has waited eagerly for the release of this work, I am sorry to have kept you waiting. I sincerely hope you were able to enjoy the modernized version of this heartwarming story. Please be at ease, this is Carlo Zen's *War Chronicles of a Little Girl* after all! On a side note, the next whole section is dedicated to the new readers of this series, for existing readers it would be pointless to continue, it might be better to just skip reading altogether.

Now then, to the first time readers of this series, I'm pleased to meet you. I am Carlo Zen. Although it might sound strange to hear this coming from the author, but I will not lie to you. The content of this work is slightly towards "that" kind of area, please think of it carefully.

First of all, it is another one of those books which features the typical themes of Gods transgender alternate world reincarnation with a complete package of magic

along with a “I’m invincible” kind of protagonist. Yes, that kind of work. Yet after having said that, the title ended up becoming 『War Chronicles of a Little Girl』 , something which could only have had happened due to a bad hangover or a sleepless night filled with tension. Furthermore, not a single person had said a thing to stop me, making me feel rather uneasy towards the future of Japan.

Not only that, the writer known as Carlo Zen is also a rather despicable kind guy to speak of. After all, he is someone who would naturally end up spouting phrases such as “why is it that stories which contains original protagonists and delves into the internal affairs and politics of a nation always ends up becoming a success?”, and if he were to be ignored, words of shout would be heard as he yells loudly atop of his head “Have you even read any relevant books in regards to developmental studies? Or know that the randomized controlled trials have recently concluded that silver bullets do not exist?” In short, he was that kind of despicable guy.

And the most helpless part of it all is him possessing a twisted personality yet all the while loving to debate. Sigh, having only said this, one should be able to conclude just how hopeless he really is! On top of all, this Carlo Zen is also the kind of guy that sneers at the beliefs of happy ending and supremacy victory <TL: basically the mentality to win no matter the cost - often seen in sports animes>, and is deeply fascinated by the types of retrograde and withdrawal battles fought within quagmire, the various end stage battles as well as the “courage and solidarity of the international community”; someone who is deeply afflicted with those kinds of sickness.

If you’re the type of reader that is fond of dreams, hope, and peace, or the type that loves happy endings and despises when protagonists are unable to win... Most likely, it would perhaps be better for you not to read this series any further.

Although having said that, I would still feel rather troubled if my books were unable to sell.

So putting things aside, to the comrades who have forsaken themselves to the lure of this series and managed to cross the unspeakable barrier, I say welcome! We sincerely welcome you with open arms!

October 2013,
Carlo Zen

Glossary

Many military terms encountered in this novel even now I'm not sure what their exact English counterpart is, some might just not exist such as 梯団teidan (although some dictionaries have it listed as echelon in English but when comparing the actual meanings they don't quite match), others like (即応部隊 sokuou butai) where I can't tell if it should be translated as rapid reaction force or quick reaction force. Below is a list of military unit sizes and their English correspondence used in our translations. The same JP term is used for both army and aerial mage units in the LN. Hope this clears some of the confusion.

Military Structure

JP Term	Army	Air force (British)
軍団 (gundan)	Corps	???
師団 (shidan)	Division	Division
旅団 (ryodan)	Brigade	Group
大隊 (daitai)	Battalion	Wing
中隊 (chuutai)	Company	Squadron
小隊 (shoutai)	Platoon	Flight

Credits

Translators:

Rinhz, Skythewood, Ghoststaker, Shuvi, SifaV6

Editors:

*Ghoststaker, Doopington, Rockgollem, Namorax, Skythewood, SifaV6, JcqC,
CWilliams,
CEObrainz*

Raw Provider:

swiss Momo

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